A Reader Responds to J. Jenkins's "Current Perspectives on Teaching World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca"

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■ There is much that one can agree with in Jennifer Jenkins's article in *TESOL Quarterly* (Jenkins, 2006). Some of her points are, however, quite controversial.

1. THE TENDENCY TO CONSIDER ELF A VARIETY OF ENGLISH COMPARABLE TO INDIGENIZED VARIETIES

Jenkins (2006) refers to English as a lingua franca (ELF) as if it were a well-established variety of English with its own norms and regularities, similar in kind if not degree to so-called nativized varieties. In her opening paragraphs, she refers to the way World Englishes (WEs) have gained increasing acceptance, setting the scene for the parallel acceptance of ELF, which is merged with WEs in collocations such as "WEs and ELF." Although Jenkins claims to be using WEs in its narrow sense of "new Englishes in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean" (p. 159), she goes on to write the whole article as if ELF were a part of WEs, a cohyponym to the superordinate term. She refers to the "consensus on WEs and ELF that is emerging" (p. 157) and repeatedly conflates ELF and indigenized varieties, sliding from one to the other as if the phenomena described were the same or comparable.

This weaving in and out of the two concepts appropriates whole swathes of argumentation to the rhetorical position of ELF (as perceived by Jenkins) even in cases where the scholars concerned have explicitly dissociated their work from her position (e.g., Kachru, 2005, pp. 211–220; Holliday, 2005, p. 164).

2. THE TRANSITION FROM DESCRIPTION OF LINGUISTIC FEATURES TO PRESCRIPTION FOR CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Jenkins (2006) suggests that teachers begin exposing "less proficient learners" to a range of ELF varieties (p.174); it is important to ponder

the implications of this statement for classroom practice, bearing in mind the only indication she gives of what ELF varieties are is the list of unproblematic forms taken from Seidlhofer: e.g., *She look very sad; a book who I like* (Seidlhofer, 2004, p. 220). To describe such forms in a non-judgemental way is a kind of descriptive linguistics and is a legitimate enterprise, but Jenkins occasionally conflates descriptive grammar and pedagogic grammar. The fallacy of much native-driven corpus linguistics was that description and prescription were assumed to be the same thing (Widdowson, 2003, p. 88). Jenkins may be committing the same fallacy.

3. THE FALLACY OF THE ABSENT NATIVE SPEAKER

Jenkins (2006) argues that the "pure" form of ELF excludes users of English as a first language (L1) from the description (p. 161). Indeed, the spirit of the native speaker haunts ELF by its absence; it is always there, hovering in the background, as a slightly malignant presence, exerting a "norming effect" (Leung, 2005, p. 128) and obliging users of English as a second language (L2) to "defer" to its dictates (Jenkins, 2006, p. 174): "Natives are always lurking" (Seidlhofer, 2002, p. 204).

Jenkins (2006) does at one point accept that "native speakers" play a minor role in "ELF"; however, this "small minority" of L1 users will "have to follow the agenda set by ELF speakers" and use any language items which may have been "codified" in ELF (p. 161). The modal verb of *obligation* suggests that ELF as far as its L1 user interlocutors are concerned is a one-way street; Jenkins would apparently seek to promote Seidlhofer's list of core items for L1 and L2 users of ELF alike. The very act of listing so-called common core items in a supposedly emerging variety of international English suggests the potential for codification of these forms, which will collectively constitute the agenda of the majority of ELF users, an agenda which all and sundry "will have to follow."

Although one can agree with Jenkins that it is unacceptable for the native English speakers to impose their agenda on ELF, it is equally unacceptable for the putative L2 users of ELF as an L2 to impose their agenda on users of ELF as an L1.

4. ELF: EMERGING OR EMERGENT?

Jenkins (2006) confusingly refers to ELF both as an "emergent phenomenon" (p. 166) and as comparable to the "emerging Englishes of the expanding circle" (p. 167). This telescoping of the two terms blurs an important distinction. The distinction between *emerging* and *emergent* has

a crucial bearing on whether one sees ELF as a product which one can capture and codify or whether one sees ELF as a process, made up of a number of lingua francas depending on the purposes to which the language is put and thus elusive in terms of the possibility of codification.

> emerging means in the course of development toward completion; "emergent" by contrast suggests a perpetual process in which movement toward a complete structure is constant but completion is always deferred. (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 14)

In *emergent* views of the utterance, a word "absorbs the sense of preceding and subsequent words, thereby extending almost without limit the boundaries of its meaning" (Vygotsky, quoted in Wertsch, 1991, p. 43). Lexis and grammar are, thus, *emergent* concepts, not fixed abstractions; their "structure is always deferred, always in a process but never arriving" (Hopper, 1998, p. 156).

An approach to language varieties as *emerging*, on the other hand, sees the development of language forms moving toward a fixed or stable point, after which the language can be codified; this is the approach taken by Jenkins (2006), who sees the ELF train coming closer in the tunnel of native speaker norms: She clearly assumes that at some "point" (p. 161) ELF will stabilize and become institutionalized and codified; she sees this as happening possibly "in another 15 years" (p. 162).

The point about ELF, then, is that it can seen by different scholars as both *emerging* and *emergent*. ELF is *emerging* because it may be moving toward its own norms, but we do not know yet what these norms look like, and it would be premature to try to capture it once and for all, to pluck the heart of its mystery; it is *emergent* because it is elusive, ever-evolving, and dialogic (Bakhtin, 1981).

5. THE CLAIM THAT ELF AND EFL ARE DIFFERENT VARIETIES

Jenkins (2006) refers to *ELF* as a distinct "variety" and distinguishes it from English as a foreign language (EFL). She asserts that EFL users are those who are learning English "for use in communication with native speakers" (p. 161). This definition of EFL is unusual if we take into account both traditional definitions of EFL and more recent ones, all of which define EFL as English learnt in a community where it is not an official language of communication (McArthur, 1992; Richards, Platt, & Weber, 1985; Strevens, 1977; Thornbury, 2006). Saville-Troike (2006) gives the standard definition of *foreign language* in contrast to *second language* as a language which is "not widely used in the learners' imme-

diate social context, but rather one that might be used for future travel or other cross-cultural communication situations" (p. 188). Saville-Troike points out, in contrast to Jenkins, that learners of EFL have little opportunity to interact with native English speakers and are not likely to need to participate in a native speaker community (p. 101). Kramsch (2002), in her discussion of ESL and EFL, goes further in distancing EFL from an exclusive focus on native speaker models: "There is little concern here with an approximation to any NS norm of language use" (p. 8). This approach to EFL (diametrically opposed to that suggested by Jenkins) assumes that there are no borders as far as ELF is concerned: EFL, ESL, and ELF users will, at some time or another, all need to negotiate encounters with diverse interlocutors, including users of ELF as an L1.

6. LINGUISTIC CAPITAL AS CONTAINED IN CODIFIED FORMS OF ENGLISH

Jenkins (2006) argues that exposing learners to their "own English varieties" will reduce their dependence on "native-like varieties" and at the same time reduce the "linguistic capital that learners believe native-like English to possess" (p. 174).

The term *linguistic capital* is associated with the work of Bourdieu (1991). Bourdieu sees language as part of a network of power relations which includes economic, social, and cultural forms of power. Economic capital is only one form of power; *symbolic capital*, of which language and culture are the main embodiments, is an additional form of power, and it affects our capacity to get access to economic and social power. The English language can be seen as symbolic capital in the hands of the colonial powers (Phillipson, 1992) or a weapon in the hands of the oppressed.

Phillipson's (1992) rejection of the role of English internationally, though morally understandable, in practical terms leaves the status quo as it is; it leaves the power of English in the hands of the dominant elites. Jenkins (2006) does not reject English outright—she offers a halfway house where, on the one hand, power structures remain infused with the common core grammar of standard English but, on the other hand, the resistance from the periphery has in its hands a broken weapon; Jenkins does not condemn her ELF users to voicelessness, but, in my view, she risks bringing them stuttering onto the world stage: "English is a linguistic capital and we ignore it at our peril" (Canagarajah, 2006, p. 205).

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