

# Report for “International English” Education Research Group, The Institute for Research in Humanities and Social Sciences, Aichi University, Academic Years 2017-2018

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## Introduction

The “International English” Education Research Group (“国際英語”教育研究会) of The Institute for Research in Humanities and Social Sciences, Aichi University (人文社会学研究所、愛知大学) continued its work during the academic years of 2017-2018 studying aspects of the Contemporary International English (CIE) program in the Faculty of Letters. During this two-year period, three additional researchers joined the project and one retired. The research group continued to investigate student attitudes towards learning and using English, as well as teachers’ reflections on their classroom experiences and involvement with program development through interviews. In addition, researchers presented at international conferences focused on English as a lingua franca (ELF10, Helsinki; ELF11, London) and English language education in Asia (RELC 2018, Singapore) as well as attending numerous symposiums held in Japan, broadening their understanding of current research and making connections with like-minded researchers. The research group also sponsored two forums, inviting speakers with extensive knowledge of ELF to the Aichi University Toyohashi campus, providing opportunities for further networking. Finally, two papers were published by the researchers based on their research activities. In this report, the above mentioned activities are described and future endeavors are suggested.

## Presentations Made at International Conferences

ELF10: *ELF and Changing English: 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference of English as a Lingua Franca*, Helsinki (June 2017). “Paradoxes and paradigm shifts: Organic development of an ELF-focused program in Japan”

The presentation analyzed the challenges of developing CIE at Aichi University. The group attempted to explore the whole dynamic of CIE’s inception, evolution and possible trajectories, from the immediate limitations of the institution to the wider context of shifting social norms and messaging in government education policies regarding English.

RELC 2018: *50 Years of English Language Teaching and Assessment: Reflections, Insights and Possibilities*. Singapore (March, 2018). “Transitioning to ELF-inspired curriculum and pedagogy: Students’ evolving perceptions of English”

The presentation described the organic development of CIE at Aichi University in relation to the emergence of ELF related issues including the pluralities of English, native speaker policies and practices, and learner identities in relation to English. Multilayered narratives described alignment and resistance to the administrative discourse and trajectory envisioned by education policy makers as a result of latent native-speakerism.

ELF11: *11<sup>th</sup> International Conference of English as a Lingua Franca: ELF, Migration and Multilingualism. Preconference teachers day; ELF in the Classroom: What do teachers do in response to ELF?* London (July, 2018). “Through an ELF-filtered lens: Evolving perceptions of teaching and learning English”

The presentation explored a unique approach to establishing an English program which would challenge outdated notions of language and culture, and provide students with the ELF skills that they

would certainly require in their future English communications, in a campus environment that is lacking in traditional “ELFness”, being primarily monolingual.

All three presentations outlined CIE’s attempted approaches and ideologies in creating an environment where ELF skills can organically develop, and where students are encouraged to begin questioning notions such as the importance of accuracy as opposed to intelligibility, as well as to broaden their cultural and intellectual horizons. In brief, the program uses challenging subject matter and tasks that require students to use skills such as negotiation and accommodation in order to establish mutual understanding. Students in the program are also consistently exposed to the idea that in practical English communication, the English spoken can be influenced by any number of factors, including L1, culture, and accent. Thus, the students come to realize that it is the ability to understand and be understood, or the “realm of intelligibility” that takes precedence over accurate, “native speaker language”. Finally, students are encouraged to step outside of their comfort zone through participation in academic and social activities requiring not only the use of English but also subtle shifts in mindset.

The presenters spoke about student and instructor reactions to this program and style of instruction, which ranged from changes in attitude towards English and the diversity of those who speak it, to expansion of thought processes, to appreciation of the opportunity for individual expression.

### **Hosting Forums at Aichi University**

The research group hosted two forums to raise awareness and discuss developments relating to English as a lingua franca from theoretical and applied research perspectives. Seven different presenters from academic institutions in Japan discussed their work and perspectives on the role of English in the world and in Japan. The forums are described below.

At the first forum held on April 22, 2017, *Paradigm Shifting in Asian Englishes: Promoting an ELF Mindset in Japan*, four educators covered a wide range of topics connected to English education and the influence of ELF. In his talk about listener attitudes towards what he described as ‘Japan English’, Takayuki Nagamine of Aichi University of Education pointed out phonetic features that can trigger negative evaluations of intelligibility. Given the fluidity and flexibility that ELF pronunciation has, he spoke about the need to create more learner awareness about bias against English pronunciation used by many Japanese speakers. On the topic of native-speakerist notions prevalent in English language teaching (ELT), Patrick Ng of the University of Niigata Prefecture shared a narrative account of how switching to an ELF-informed teaching paradigm empowered him to be confident as a legitimate English teacher. Using one’s professional and personal capabilities to expand students’ understanding of how English is used in the wider world were important insights. The third speaker, Tricia Okada of Tamagawa University focused on how the emergence of Filipino English language teachers in Japan is relevant to the larger discussion concerning non-native speaker teachers and the role that ELF can have in enriching such discussions. Finally, Alan Thompson of Gifu Shotoku Gakuen University reported on his fieldwork in authentic ELF environments in Japan. His data showed how the participants in various events which involved those with diverse linguistic backgrounds negotiated the use of English to successfully achieve communication. This forum provided an opportunity to engage with concrete examples of ELF research being applied in situations both within the classroom and in wider society.

At the second forum held on October 27, 2018, *ELFing Up the Classroom: Pedagogy and Materials*, three speakers with extensive expertise in ELF and World Englishes research provided an opportunity to better understand how ELF research and pedagogy have evolved and what impact they have on ELT. Tomokazu Ishikawa of Tamagawa University spoke about confusion within ELT about ELF because

some misunderstand ELF to be a prescriptive linguistic system. He then focused on how ELF-aware pedagogy can be introduced to English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms and discussed the possible benefits to students from such activities. Also from Tamagawa University, Paul McBride discussed how the corrective training focus of teaching of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) pedagogy can limit curriculum development in contexts such as Japan. He outlined his attempts to introduce different types of learning experiences that would encourage learners to become more aware of how ELF is used, including their own experiences. Finally, James D'Angelo of Chukyo University provided an extensive introduction to World Englishes (WE) research and how it has impacted ELT, particularly in the area of intelligibility. He also pointed out the limitations of WE and how ELF research has come to serve the needs of practitioners in the Expanding Circle. The talks were followed by extensive questions from the audience, illustrating the high level of interest in ELF research and its possible applications to classroom pedagogy.

### **Research Networking Activity**

The various networking activities served to bring an awareness of the “International English” Education Research Group’s activities to the wider ELF community in Japan and abroad, to learn from the experiences of other ELF and Global English researchers, to share experiences, to hear from academic leaders in the field and to coordinate possible future academic trajectories. The activities are described below.

Three members attended *RELC 2017 52ND RELC International Conference: Dimensions of Language Education: Policy, Perspectives, Practice*, held at the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Language Centre, Singapore March 13-15, 2017. This conference served several functions for the research group in that it provided a venue to network, learn, and assess the conference. The conference theme was of particular interest to the group as each member focused on a different dimension - policy, perspectives on pedagogy, and putting it into practice. RELC 2017 proved an ideal venue for the group to stay apprised of regional developments and to present the group’s future research developments.

One member attended *JACET ELF SIG Symposium, English as a Lingua Franca and Native-speakerism in ELT* held at Waseda University on April 29, 2017. This symposium was advertised as providing “a platform for ELF practitioners to discuss the negative consequences of the imagined and deeply entrenched native-speakerism in the Japanese educational context, articulate the pedagogical and linguistic strengths of local/multilingual English teachers as well as seek solutions to the various constraints presented by native-speakerism.” An opportunity to socialize with the four invited speakers and organizers of the event led to establishing and further consolidating contacts with those in the forefront of ELF research and advocacy in Japan.

Three members attended *JACET 56<sup>th</sup> International Conference, English in a Globalized World: Exploring Lingua Franca Research and Pedagogy*, held in Tokyo at Aoyama Gakuin University on August 29-30, 2017. Active debates concerning ELF’s possible future in Japan ELT as well as reports from scholars teaching in Asian and European contexts provided further evidence of the importance of the need to keep in touch with current research.

Three members made a formal *visit to Tamagawa University Center for English as a Lingua Franca* in October, 2017. Activities included a guided tour of the new Center facilities as well as opportunities to observe classes in session. Informal discussions with instructors about the Center’s development and

future directions provided invaluable insight on how an institution is revamping English education for all departments using ELF-aware pedagogy.

*The 2<sup>nd</sup> ELF SIG Meeting*, held on December 8, 2018 at Chukyo University, Nagoya, was attended by one member. This event provided an opportunity to become more familiar with the research of ELF SIG members who are active in the Kanto region.

*The 8<sup>th</sup> Waseda ELF International Workshop and Symposium*, Tokyo, held on January 27-28, 2019 was attended by one member. It marked a milestone for ELF-related research in Japan and featured both well-known scholars from abroad as well as graduate students studying in Japan. The audience included both JACET ELF SIG members and those in related applied linguistics fields, illustrating the great interest that ELF has generated in ELT overall in Japan. This symposium provided an opportunity to renew relationships thus far established with ELF researchers and to engage with them about possible future programs for this project.

### Interview Data Collection/Analysis

Interview data was collected from both students and instructors of the CIE program. Students were recommended by their seminar instructors and the researcher in charge of interviewing arranged for the individual or sometimes paired interviews that took place in the researcher's office. The semi-structured interviews lasted about 60 minutes on the average and were conducted in the language chosen by the student. The interviews focused on students' experiences in CIE classes and study abroad programs and their overall evaluations of their English language learning and using experiences. Details of the interview schedule are listed below in Table 1.

Table 1

#### Student Interviews Conducted Academic Years 2017-2018

| <u>Name</u>  | <u>Year</u>     | <u>Gender</u> | <u>Language Used</u> | <u>Academic Year</u> |
|--------------|-----------------|---------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Kazu         | 3 <sup>rd</sup> | M             | English              | 2017                 |
| Yuri         | 3 <sup>rd</sup> | F             | English              | 2017                 |
| Ryoko        | 3 <sup>rd</sup> | F             | English              | 2017                 |
| Kiichi       | 3 <sup>rd</sup> | M             | English              | 2017                 |
| Asami        | 3 <sup>rd</sup> | F             | English              | 2017                 |
| Eiko*, Michi | 4 <sup>th</sup> | F             | Japanese             | 2017                 |
| Saori*, Yuki | 4 <sup>th</sup> | F             | Japanese             | 2017                 |
| Asami*       | 4 <sup>th</sup> | F             | Japanese             | 2018                 |
| Kiichi*      | 4 <sup>th</sup> | M             | Japanese             | 2018                 |
| Ryoko*       | 4 <sup>th</sup> | F             | English              | 2018                 |

Note: All names are pseudonyms.

\*Students who were interviewed twice.

Third-year students in the CIE major could be described as having oftentimes contradictory notions about learning and using English. They tended to be somewhat severe in their self-evaluations and exhibited sensitivity to how others evaluated them. In particular, comments made by teachers in study abroad programs or on campus classes led them to be very critical of their pronunciation and overall ability. Identifying themselves as English majors to outside people was embarrassing for some and they

emphasized that they were very far from their perceived goals, such as being able to work abroad or in language education. They also commented on the value of learning about communication strategies and how they used them in their interactions. Their evolving perceptions of themselves as English learners/users could be summed up as follows:

1. Tends to be deficit-skewed (I don't have confidence, my level is still low) →using native speaker as model?
2. Searching for 'what is good enough' to be able to label oneself as English speaker
3. Sensitive to outside eyes (native speaker pronunciation, TOEIC scores)
4. Valuing ELF (paraphrasing, communication-focus, experience ELF does work)

As for 4th year students interviewed immediately prior to graduation, their comments focused more on what they saw as their accomplishments and what they gained from having studied in CIE. The diversity of the students in terms of their experiences after joining the program, i.e. participation in study abroad or future employment decisions does not allow for any broad generalizations. Some of the salient points that were made by multiple students can be summed up as below.

1. Recognized pitfalls in previous English education: Inner Circle English bias
2. Accepted multiple pronunciations/own pronunciation of English
3. Learning about ELF was empowering: "ease one's mind"
4. Having confidence (in one's English) improves communication

Concerning the teachers in the program, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted as listed in Table 2, and focused on their reflections on classroom practice, program issues, and possible improvements for the future. They mentioned the need for more ongoing, informal exchange of information about classroom materials and pedagogy, given that they teach many of the same core courses such as Communicative English. Another topic was the lack of dialogue with the senior faculty concerning overall program objectives and how the CIE core courses could best serve the students for their seminar work.

Table 2

*Teacher Interviews Conducted Academic Years 2017-2018*

| <u>Name</u> | <u>Date</u>     | <u>Years Teaching in CIE</u> |
|-------------|-----------------|------------------------------|
| Arthur      | July, 2017      | 4 years                      |
| Barry       | September, 2017 | 3 years                      |
|             | January, 2019   | 4 years                      |
| Cathy       | December, 2018  | 1 year                       |

Note: All names are pseudonyms

**Three Papers Published by the Researchers**

Three papers were published by the researchers during the past two years based on their research activities connected to this project. They are listed below followed by a short abstract.

1. Lyons, P. (2018). An investigation in the Language Cafe: A needs analysis. *Language and Culture*, 39, 99-112.

Even in one's first language, initiating and continuing conversation can be difficult. When it comes to speaking in an L2, the difficulty may be magnified by any number of factors ranging from a lack of vocabulary to social anxiety. The 'Language Cafe' is a growing concept across universities in Japan. It is known by other names such as 'Global Lounge' and 'Chat Space' depending on the university, yet they all contain similar characteristics - those being its informal setting, its emphasis on building fluency through 'free conversation' rather than language correction, and L2 use being encouraged rather than demanded. During lunchtime especially, the cafe is seen to be a place where students and language instructors can talk in a relaxed environment giving the student an authentic language experience free from the formal constraints of the classroom.

This investigation is concerned heavily with Needs Analysis and determining more specifically a potential need for the creation of a 'Language Menu' to help scaffold conversation.

- What are both teachers' and students' current perceptions of the cafe's state and success?
- What are the motivating factors for student attendance at the cafe and how could non-attendees be encouraged to attend?
- Would more structure in terms of materials to support conversation be a welcome addition to the cafe?

2. Devolin, D. (2018). Evolving perceptions of English: Investigating Contemporary International English pedagogy. *Language and Culture*, 39, 113-128.

Contemporary International English (CIE) is a relatively new major (in the Faculty of Letters) still finding its feet. CIE currently has two short-term contract instructors shouldering the bulk of CIE courses that prepare students for one of three seminar instructors. Maintaining the contemporary nature of the program involves continuous, open, and frank discussions about what CIE *is*, the role of international English, and the value of the program to students and the university at large. The impermanence of preparatory CIE instructors highlights challenges to this dialogue and the need for CIE to have core pedagogy that accommodates faculty changes and maintains its 'contemporary' focus on international English. This paper aims to discuss two CIE concepts, the *Triple Bottom Line* and the *Realm of Intelligibility*, and two CIE practices, applying an ELF Lens and Faculty Mentoring, that are flexible to faculty changes and maintain a contemporary outlook.

3. Kusaka, L. (2018). The 11th International Conference of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF11): ELF, migration and multilingualism. *Asian Englishes*, DOI: 10.1080/13488678.2018.1560957

This Conference Report focused on the pre-conference event "ELF in the classroom: What do teachers do in response to ELF" and the invited colloquiums of the main conference "ELF, migration and multilingualism" organized by the leading scholars Jennifer Jenkins and Barbara Seidlhofer. The need for a 'social justice turn' in ELF research reverberated throughout many of the colloquiums, with reports of ongoing research projects dealing with 'awkward questions' such as: Is ELF sanitizing the spread of English in education? Is ELF contributing to making other languages less visible? Is ELF contributing to language inequality?

## **Future Aims**

Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) has not seen the level of ELF focus as its more academic counterpart Japan Association of College English Teachers (JACET), perhaps due to its standing as an association focusing more on applied rather than theoretical approaches to language teaching. The research group has submitted a proposal for the 2019 JALT International Conference aiming to raise awareness of ELF and the research group's work relating to teacher efficacy and learner agency.

Student and teacher interview data collection will continue in addition to the sponsorship of forums focusing on how ELF research can provide impetus for making changes in ELT in general and at the university level in particular.