

Exploring Armenian University English Language Teachers' Attitudes towards English and Their Awareness of English as a Lingua Franca

Iren Hovhannisyan

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
Greece

This paper reports on the findings of a study conducted among six Armenian university teachers of English, and in particular it aims at examining the teachers' awareness of the latest developments related to the body of work on English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), their own exposure to ELF, as well as their opinion about their students' exposure to ELF. What is more, in this study, we tried to unveil whether the Armenian university context could be characterized as a multicultural educational setting, also the teachers' attitudes towards English, and finally the role and function of English alongside other foreign languages (FLs) in Armenian university. The paper presents the educational milieu and the level of internationalization of Armenia which sets against background of the study. A questionnaire and online interviews with the teachers were used as main research tools. The findings of the study are believed to shed light upon attitudes towards and beliefs about ELF in a dynamically developing Expanding circle country.

Keywords: ELF; attitudes, ELF-awareness; Armenia;

1. Introduction

The present study is a follow-up study to the one conducted among Armenian adult speakers of English (N=175), which aimed at investigating their attitudes towards English, the role of English in Armenia and outside its borders, the importance of English and its use in daily life, and most importantly whether English was perceived as a Lingua Franca in Armenia or not (Hovhannisyan 2016). The results of the preceding study yielded an interesting and paradoxical picture. On the one hand, the use of English as a lingua franca in the Armenian context was questioned due to the more wide use of the Russian language in Armenia, as acknowledged by the vast majority of the respondents. On the other hand, the respondents recognized the importance and the role of English as a lingua franca in the rest of the world. The findings of the aforementioned study led to an interest to revisit those issues from a different perspective. In particular, the aim of the present study is to investigate the role of English in Armenian universities, the level of internationalization of the tertiary education, whether English functions as a lingua franca or not, the extent to which the teachers and their students are exposed to ELF, whether the Armenian university context could be characterised as a multicultural educational setting, attitudes towards English, and finally the role and function of English alongside other foreign languages (FLs) in Armenian university. Six university teachers of English agreed to provide their answers to the formulated open-ended questions.

The results are believed to provide answers to the following research questions:

- a) Does English function as a lingua franca at Armenian HEIs?
- b) What are the teachers' attitudes towards English?
- c) To what extent are the teachers ELF-aware?
- d) How often and in which situations are the respondents/their students exposed to ELF-related situations?

2. Theoretical background

2.1 English as a lingua franca

ELF is a relatively novel concept, a new paradigm, according to which English is examined within its international and intercultural dimension as a common language for international communication for speakers who come from differing linguacultural backgrounds. Firth (1996) defines ELF as "a contact language between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication" (p. 240). Seidlhofer holds that "ELF can be thought of as —any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option" (Seidlhofer 2011: 7).

Taking the above into consideration, one could rather assume that ELF is a culture-free and neutral tool for international communication (House 2002). On the other hand, there are some arguments that ELF carries the culture of its speakers (Pözl and Seidlhofer 2006). Likewise, Hülbauer (2007) seems to believe that ELF users develop their own markers of identity, for example, a European identity, an international or an individual one. In this respect, ELF is not completely culture free, but rather multicultural. What is more, one of the most crucial aspects of ELF is fluid and flexible which makes it possible to go beyond static descriptions of formal linguistic properties and focus on processes and practices such as “*linguaging*” and “*translinguaging*” (Cogo 2012). The later emphasizes the dynamic and multilingual nature of ELF, where more importance is placed on the “*speaker’s creative practices in their use of plurilingual resources to flexibly co-construct their common repertoire in accordance with the needs of their community and the circumstances of the interaction*” (Cogo 2015). As mentioned above, ELF research is in its initial, descriptive phase and the scope of interest of many researchers has mainly focused on the examination of issues, such as attitudes and identity (Jenkins 2007, Meierkord 2002), language ownership (Brutt-Griffler and Samimy 1999, Widdowson 1994), the role of ELF within English language teaching (ELT) pedagogy (Dewey 2012, Jenkins 2012), and ELF-aware teacher education (Bayyurt and Akcan 2015, Sifakis 2014).

2.2 Attitudes towards ELF

Regarding the studies which have been conducted on ELF attitudes, some key studies in this field (e.g. Decke-Cornill 2002; Matsuda 2003; Sifakis and Sougari 2003, 2005; Sougriand Sifakis 2007; Timmis 2002; Young and Walsh 2010) provide insights into the issue of teachers’/students’ attitudes towards ELF. In their studies on teachers’ and students’ attitudes towards ELF, researchers sought to explore issues such as pronunciation, grammar, ownership, identity, possible changes in ELT, ELF-awareness raising, and international posture, among others.

The results of the aforementioned studies have to do with various areas around ELF. For example, they highlight the fact that there is sometimes a predilection for native speaker (NS) norms in grammar and pronunciation (Jenkins 2007; Sifakis and Sougari 2005, 2010; Timmis 2002), they acknowledge the importance of ELF on a practical level but at the same time they are not sure as to whether ELF is readily incorporated in their teaching practices (Decke-Cornill 2002, Young and Walsh 2010), for example, because they have to teach the standard NS model according to their schools’ syllabus or due to students’ objective to get a good grade at language proficiency exams which uses NS marking criteria (Hsuan-Yau 2008). Therefore, the findings of the above mentioned studies show that teachers in the majority of cases are reluctant to incorporate ELF into their teaching practices.

The same tendency can also be noticed among the students, in so far as the results of the above studies display reluctance and resistance to acknowledge or to accept ELF, and what is more lack of ELF-awareness. Consequently, students seem to prefer NS norms and varieties (particularly AmE) (Friedrich 2000, Timmis 2002), and to acknowledge the international status of English but claim that English belongs to its NSs (Matsuda 2003), and last but not least show poor knowledge of other English language dialects and varieties in various countries where English is the second official language or has a special status (e.g. Indian English).

The review of the most recent publications on students’ and teachers’ attitudes towards ELF shows that, unfortunately, in many cases especially in the expanding circle countries (Kachru 1990), attitudes are still negative. This, in the majority of cases, refers to attitudes towards accents and varieties of English where NS ideology still obviously prevails (Fang 2016). What is more, in Fang’s study (2016), over 70% of respondents were dissatisfied with their own English accents. Fang (2016) very accurately puts that this shows that the Chinese learners perceive themselves as language learners rather than language users holding the view that their Chinese accented English is not adequate for communication. The same findings were supported by Wang’s (2015) study, where many of his respondents claimed that native English should be maintained regardless the unattainability of the goal.

A study among Finnish upper secondary school students (Jokilehto 2014) revealed almost the same negative attitudes towards ELF and an evident preference for the native English model. The study also showed that they were ELF-unaware. In contrast, there are some studies the results of which show that the upper secondary students are well aware of ELF-related issues (Ranta 2010). In the same study, the students reported to feel confident with non-native English speakers and did not want to sound native-like.

What is more, in studies conducted by Ranta (2010) among Finnish students and Xu and Van de Poel (2011) among Flemish students, there seems to appear a palpable division between “school English” and “real-life English”. In both cases, the students on the one hand acknowledge the international role of English and are well aware of ELF, on the other hand, though, they are still highly attached to native speaker variety.

2.3 ELF in academic settings

English has established itself as a language of international communication in many key domains such as business, aviation, diplomacy, education and universities as well. In particular, English is increasingly becoming the language of instruction at universities all over the world, and standardised tests such as TOEFL and IELTS constitute a prerequisite for acceptance of international students. However, some authors oppose to such a widespread English-medium type of instruction for the risk of losing individuals’ unique national, linguistic and cultural heritage (Curry and Lillis 2004). Whatever the attitudes towards ELF in academic settings are, English is expanding its influence in the international university context and is becoming the centre of educational and academic exchange.

Student exchange programmes such as the ones from AISEC, the EU-funded programmes Erasmus and Socrates, and the US-funded Fulbright ones constitute a unique opportunity for students to travel and study in different countries, thus fostering their knowledge, communicative skills and naturally ELF skills too. In this respect, the internationalization of higher education is a global and inevitable trend. The investigation of English as a contact language in academic settings was initiated and is still being advanced in the framework of ELFA project (Mauranen 2015). This project aims at compiling a corpus of spoken and written academic ELF-mediated interactions, the analysis of which will help to shed more light on successful ELF interactions among speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds in academic settings. English-mediated instruction has practically become a prerequisite in many universities worldwide due to the increasing number of incoming international students and many programmes are specially designed in English to meet that need.

The ELFA project is focused on three subprojects: the ELFA corpus, which is a one-million-word corpus of spoken academic English as a lingua franca; the WrELFA, which is a written academic ELF and is drawn from academic genres including the institutional, professional and digital media; and the SELF (Studying in English as a Lingua Franca) project, which aims at examining interactive and adaptive processes in action from the point of view of ELF users. Therefore, academia “is one of the domains that has adopted English as its common language, and is one where international communication characterizes the domain across the board” (Mauranen, Perez-Llantada & Swales 2010:640).

3. The context of the study

3.1 ELT in Armenia

Armenia is a small country which is mainly monolingual and monoethnic, in so far as 96% of the population is Armenian and the official language is Armenian. In the Armenian socio-educational context, the Russian language has always been the second language and subsequently the first foreign language for teaching and communication, and this is due to various historical reasons which have to do with the relations between Russia and Armenia. Specifically, Russian is taught from Grade 2 onwards as the default first foreign language, and English along with French and German are introduced to the national curriculum from Grade 3 onwards as a second foreign language. However, the choice of the foreign language is optional and it is up to the school councils to decide the default second foreign language. Some schools offer languages such as Spanish, Italian or Greek as a second foreign language in the framework of intergovernmental agreements or in cooperation with the Embassies of the respective countries. It is worth mentioning here that around 85% of state primary and secondary schools opt for English as their default second foreign language. With respect to time allocation, English is taught for two hours per week from Grades 3 to 9, that is, throughout compulsory secondary education (Zolyan et al. 2008).

Armenia’s language education policy seems to align with the Council of Europe language policy principles, which are called up to develop plurilingualism, language diversity, mutual understanding, democratic citizenship, multicultural skills and abilities of individuals for social cohesion and active participation in democratic and public processes in a multilingual society. In this way, the students are provided with equal opportunities for individual development, education, work, free movement, accessibility to information and cultural heritage.

In an attempt to follow the above outlined principles and more specifically to develop multilingualism and language diversity, the third foreign language (English, German or French) has been introduced from Grade 5 onwards, which is taught for two hours per week.

With regard to the role of English in higher education in Armenia, English is a compulsory subject in the higher educational system and a centralized English or other foreign language examination is a requirement for entrance to the majority of universities, whether they are state and private (Applicant's Guide 2014). In addition, TOEFL is required for post-graduate programme admission to almost all schools and faculties. English-medium instruction is only available at the American university of Armenia, which offers MA courses in applied linguistics, economics and political science. Armenian HEIs actively participate in student exchange programmes, but they seem to be more focused on outgoing students. The State Medical University is for example the most preferable destination for many students from India, Iran and other countries. What is more, FL instruction is a prerequisite in many HEIs in both humanities and applied sciences. FLs are taught during the first four terms of BA studies in almost all university faculties of the country.

3.2 Level of internationalization of Armenia

To be able to interpret the findings of the present study, it is considered important to present the level of internationalisation of Armenia, in other words, the degree to which Armenia is involved in the international community and is open to international communication. Armenia is a member of various major international organisations, such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, Council of Europe (CoE), International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), International Finance Cooperation (IFC), International Telecommunications Union, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), UNCTAD/UNESCO, United Nations (UN), World Customs Organization, World Tourism Organization and World Trade Organization (WTO). What is more, many NGOs and international companies operate in Armenia and realise long-term projects and investments.

Based on the above, it could be said that Armenia is a rightful member of the world society developing harmonically its international relations in different areas. Nevertheless, the influence of Russia is still felt in many areas of the socio-political life in Armenia. At the economic level, the greatest share of good import and export is realised to and from Russia as well as other former USSR republics. Russian companies are the greatest shareholders in key industrial, strategic and manufacturing companies. It is for the above reasons that Armenia socially, politically and strategically depends greatly on Russia.

On educational level, Armenia seems to be advancing and attracting more and more international students, educators and international schools. Dilijan School, a member of United World Colleges (UWC), is a new educational destination for many international students, unique in the region, situated in the most picturesque region of Armenia on modern and eco-friendly premises. UWC Dilijan has hosted about 300 students from 80 countries worldwide. This is important because it indicates that English is definitely used as a lingua franca in the UWC Dilijan School between the staff, the teachers and students as well as the medium of instruction (source: <http://uwcdilijan.org/>).

Another example of educational and technological advancement is the TUMO centre for creative technologies (<https://www.tumo.org/>) donated to Armenia by a US couple of Armenian origin. The center offers free education to everyone aged 8 to 21 in the fields of animation, game development, filmmaking and web design. This center attracts a great number of trainers and coaches from all around the world, large game developing and web companies cooperate with the TUMO in search of outstanding specialists and talented students. On the level of language use, it becomes clear that English is gradually becoming a language of communication. Of course, Russian is the acknowledged language of a wider communication but the increase of Armenia's participation in global issues on all the levels will gradually bring to the use of English as a LF.

What is more, English has already begun to be used as a language of intranational communication between Armenians, who live in Armenia and members of the Armenian Diaspora, people of Armenian origin living in different parts of the world. This phenomenon is becoming more and more widespread. Fourth generation Armenians visit their homeland, their knowledge of Armenian (Western Armenian) is very poor or inadequate so they cannot communicate with their Armenian friends, who speak Eastern Armenian. So here, English functions as a language of intranational or intraethnic communication. We can state, that sometimes English helps all the Armenians all over the world keep united and connected.

4. Method

4.1 Participants, research tool and data collection

The cohort of participants of this research study was composed of six university teachers of English (for the profile of the respondent, see Table 1). All the participants are females with teaching experience ranging from one to twelve years. Also, all the participants work at state universities and teach English to English majors. The sample was selected judgmentally, that is, from those teachers of English who agreed to participate in the research. A questionnaire composed of 18 open-ended questions was sent out to the participants, and they provided their answers both online and offline, mainly in a written form, with the exception of two respondents with whom multiple Skype interviews were conducted. After the answers had been collected and analysed, the participants were contacted again, and they were asked more specific questions. This way, they had the opportunity to provide me with more nuanced verbalisations of their thoughts in a way which sometimes was clarifying what they had replied in the questionnaire and sometimes was further elaborating on them.

The questionnaire was composed of three parts: The first part had to do with teachers' ELF-awareness, for example, whether the teachers had ever come across any articles or materials on ELF or whether they had participated in workshops or conferences related to ELF. The second one had to do with the tutors' opinion about their students' use of English, English proficiency and ELF-awareness. Finally, the third part had to do with the teachers' attitudes towards English, the use of English as a lingua franca and their experiences as ELF users. Content analysis of the data took place in order to examine in order to shed some more light on the teachers' perceptions. Content analysis is considered the most convenient method for the analysis because it is applied directly to texts or transcripts i.e. products of human communication. According to Cohen et al. (2007), content analysis refers to the process of summarizing and interpreting written data where large amount of written data is reduced to smaller groups of information. We can distinguish between qualitative and quantitative content analysis where qualitative content analysis is referred to as "latent level analysis" (Dörnyei, 2007), because it concerns an interpretative analysis of underlying deeper meaning of the data. In contrast, quantitative content analysis is often described as "manifest level analysis" (ibid.), which provides a descriptive overview of the surface meaning of the data. The same opinion is shared by Zhang and Wildemuth (2009): "qualitative content analysis goes beyond merely counting words or extracting objective content from texts to examine meaning, themes, and patterns that may be manifest or latent in a particular way".

Of course, it has been highlighted by many scholars that in research practice, the approaches are usually combined (Dörnyei, 2007; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

5. Results

5.1 Teachers' ELF-awareness

The first and the most important consideration was to find out whether the teachers were ELF-aware, and if so what their attitudes were towards ELF as well as whether they incorporated ELF in their teaching practices. The results showed that the teachers were not ELF-aware. For example, when asked what in their perception ELF is, their replies were along the lines of "language of communication". For example, T3 explained that ELF means, "*English is spoken and used outside the UK and the USA for communication between different people*". T5 provided a more extended definition on what it seems the general concept of a lingua franca, that is, "*any language that group of people who do not know each other's languages use to interact. It may concern any field: education, business, everyday conversation*". Many of the teachers considered the abbreviation 'ELF' problematic and they mistakenly confused it with 'EFL'. As a result, in the majority of the cases, the teachers' answers related to English as a foreign language, e.g. "*EFL is taught all over the world to people of different ages in public and private education*" (T1).

T6 was the only respondent who had participated in various seminars organised by the British Council in Yerevan, Armenia, in relation to ELF and global Englishes, and she had also attended a special event with Professor David Crystal as an invited speaker. Nevertheless, T6 was unaware of specific ELF-related research literature or some key names in this research area, and likewise she had used ELF-informed materials in her classes before. The results may initially seem quite distressing, but as the ensuing analysis will show, the teachers may have never felt the need to look into the different and 'unusual' dimension of English as a lingua franca.

5.2 Students' exposure to ELF

The teachers were also asked whether they believed that their students were exposed to ELF situations in their institutions or in the society in general. The majority of the teachers believed that their students were not exposed to ELF situations within their institutions. What is more, T5 specified that their students were not exposed to ELF situations within their institutions very frequently, but they used ELF frequently when travelling to different countries on exchange programmes.

T3 pointed out that her students used English at the debate clubs organised by the lecturers at their universities. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that in this case as well, there is a kind of confusion between EFL and ELF: *"Most of my students are exposed to EFL situations during English classes (we do our best to use English as much as possible)"*. After a clarification, it became evident that T3 generally referred to situations where English was used. In addition, T6 believed that her students were exposed to ELF during conferences and when attending seminars with guest speakers. In her turn, T1 mentioned that she had one student who previously lived in the US and used ELF quite often to communicate with his friends who came from various linguistic backgrounds. With regard to other students, she believed that they were exposed to ELF situations less often.

The above statements are also supported and substantiated by the responses to the next question, which has to do with whether the teachers could characterise their universities as multilingual and multicultural institutions. The teachers' replies were rather negative, that is, they could not confirm that their universities constituted an international and multicultural educational context. What is more, many Russian-speaking students studied in their institutions, which adds to its multicultural and multilingual character.

Another question sought to find out whether the teachers had ever taught in a multilingual and multicultural classroom. In the majority of the cases, the answer was negative, with the exception of T2 and T6. Upon further inquiry, T2 described her experience of teaching in a multicultural classroom as a rather complicated process, as she could not use the L1 in her classes. As T2 also admitted, sometimes she had to use authentic visual materials, for example, a picture from her smartphone, in order to communicate what she needed to say in a sufficient and time-effective way. T6 clarified that in her multicultural classroom, she had students from Russia and Georgia, which means that she could use Russian as a lingua franca to assist the teaching process. Nevertheless, she always preferred to use English as the only medium of instruction.

The teachers were also asked about the existence of international students in their institutions and whether English was used as a means of international communication outside the English language classroom. For that matter, the tutors partly agreed that English was quite often used as a lingua franca, but the role of Russian should not be undermined. In fact, throughout this research study, there was a strong sense that in the Armenian context two adversary lingua francas operated and coexisted, English and Russian. The respondents confirmed that their institutions participated in student exchange programmes and their students had opportunities to have a two-week stay abroad. As T2 mentioned, *"this opportunity allows students to enhance their language knowledge"*. With regard to the students' language proficiency, the teachers responded that their students were on pre-intermediate or intermediate levels.

T3 clarified: *"in our university is in contract with several countries and annually it realizes exchange of students, students go and study abroad as well as we welcomes foreign students, in this way English is used internationally"*.

5.3 The most favoured and dominant FLs

English and Russian were found to be the two equally favoured FLs in Armenia. The teachers made a mention of German and French as well, and such results are confirmed by the findings of a previous study on the Armenian context (Hovhannisyanyan 2016). As T5 characteristically mentioned, *"English for younger generation, Russian for older ones. In the fifties and more especially"*. As T3 explained: *"I think Russian is dominant because I am from a Russian speaking family and our friends are also mostly Russian speaking, there are lots of other people in Armenia whose native language is Russian and much fewer families whose native language is English."* The teachers' profile shows that all the teachers have knowledge of at least three foreign languages, which could be taken as an indication of a growing tendency towards multilingualism in the Armenian educational context.

5.4 The importance of English

The results of a previous study on the Armenian context (Hovhannisyan 2016) showed that the importance of knowing English in order to get a good job in Armenia was not a crucial motivating factor for learning the language. The results were quite surprising, considering the fact that in other contexts better job opportunities were a decisive attitudinal and motivational factor (Rahman 2005, Spolsky 1989). For this reason, the teachers' opinion of the aforementioned issue was also sought. Most of the respondents agreed that English was a prerequisite to get a good job. As T2 specifically put it, *"to me, YES. English has become not a profession for most of us but a tool that helps us get a good job. One of the main reasons is that English is an international language and we cannot use the Internet without knowing the English language"*.

Having said that, T5 expressed a different point of view. As she mentioned, *"it depends. In the fields of international communication it is a prerequisite, but for local jobs which do not deal with other countries or can be limited to the Russian language only, the knowledge of the English language becomes less demanded"*.

5.5 Teachers' exposure to ELF

It was also considered essential to shed some light on how often the teachers themselves were finding themselves in ELF contexts, as well as how these experiences of theirs as ELF users informed their classroom teaching practices. For that matter, the majority of the teachers responded that participation to ELF contexts was not taking place on a frequent basis. At this point, what needs to be pointed out is that in the beginning of the questionnaire, ELF was presented in its full form, i.e. 'English as a Lingua Franca', and later on in the text what was used is the acronym, i.e. 'ELF'. T4 for example provided the following answer: *"I am exposed to EFL situations five days a week and from five to seven hours a day as I work in two institutions. I also try to participate in workshops held in English"*. One explanation for this is that this particular teacher took the terms 'EFL' and 'ELF' as referring to the same paradigm. Another explanation is that she deliberately used the term 'EFL' in order to show her position regarding English.

T5 seemed to have a clearer picture of ELF, thus her response was more accurate representation of the situations in which the teachers of English in Armenia could be exposed to ELF. As she mentioned, *"I am exposed [to ELF] quite often, not as a teacher but as an alumni at an American university, or when I attend conferences, or take some international courses, such as CELTA. Sometimes giving directions to tourists in the streets or interacting with my foreign friends from the American University of Armenia"*. It becomes obvious then that they switch to English only in cases when Russian fails to fulfil its role as a lingua franca.

The main domains where the teachers were exposed to ELF are travelling abroad and conferences or other academic occasions. This shows that most of their ELF communication is taking place outside the confines of their institutions and their country. In addition, the teachers' replies were sought as to the domain in which they used ELF more frequently. Their replies included conferences, exchange programmes, reading literature, communicating with native speakers, travelling and summer holidays, as some of the domains within which the teachers used English as a lingua franca.

Needless to say, it cannot pass unnoticed that *"communication with native speakers"* was mentioned as a domain frequently used for ELF communication. That particular teacher was asked for a further clarification on how her ELF experience was related to the communication with the native speakers, as this is something which usually falls within the limits of the EFL domain. Nevertheless, the teacher reiterated that her communication with native speakers was an ELF-related practice.

As she said, *"I use ELF mostly when teaching students, in exchange programs, when designing educational programs, when communicating with native speakers, when teaching future teachers. Using ELF with native speakers is mostly related to professional or academic field"*.

5.7 The most crucial function of English

The teachers were also asked to express their opinion about the most crucial function of English in the world nowadays, and what was gathered was a clear sense of consensus regarding the paramount importance of English in the world. As T5 mentioned, *"English is a bridge between nations, an interpreter, as well as a means of communication"*. In a similar vein, as T2 pointed out, *"the most crucial function of English is its usage during the international events, I mean conferences, international business meetings, banking, diplomacy, etc., and the Internet. It is the main language of technology, international airports, air controllers, etc."* What this shows is that in general there is a wide acknowledgement of the role of English as an international lingua franca.

Everyone agreed that the knowledge of English is crucial for international communication, nevertheless the question on how they themselves reflected on this globally pre-eminent role of English in their classroom practices remained unclear.

5.8 The importance of English for the teachers' personal and professional life

The last question delved into the teachers' personal accounts of the role of English in their lives. Surely, all of them responded that English is the focus of their job and the source of their income. In addition, it was also reported that English helps them to be more self-confident and sociable, as T4 mentioned. It was also reported that English is very important for them when travelling, communicating with foreign friends and attending conferences. The answer of T5 was characteristic for that matter, as she provided the most characteristic trait of the English language nowadays, that of English as a lingua franca: *"to me, English is a language of survival, a language of more expanded and faster source of information, a language of communication with my AUA and CELTA foreign friends"*.

5.9 The impact of this study on teachers' ELF-awareness raising

Before the final submission of the paper, the teachers were contacted for the last time and for the most important question. They were kindly asked to reflect upon our interviews and to tell whether the present study, in general, and the different questions that they were asked to answer during the interviews incited them in any way to inquire more about ELF. This was believed to be a very useful way to understand whether interviews and different inquiries could spur interest in ELF among the teachers and, consequently, raises their ELF-awareness.

It must be mentioned that some teachers remained totally unaware of what ELF is. What is more, they still could not perceive the difference between ELF and EFL and found difficulty distinguishing it (see 5.5). In other cases, teachers had "no time" to search more information on ELF because they were on maternity leave.

Nevertheless, two teachers T5 and T6 provided very inspiring answers to the posited question. Therefore, T6 said; *"English as a lingua franca (ELF) was not a new term for me; however, in order to answer the questions during our previous interviews more accurately I decided to read more about it and referred to the website of the British Council. I came across several articles that made me contemplate over the idea that, in fact, we as teachers sometimes forget that the needs of the students who use English as a lingua franca are quite different from the ones who use it in the UK or in the United States because they don't need to integrate within the culture and sound like a native speaker. As an impact of this small research I came up with the idea that needs analysis and diagnostic tests should be conducted to identify the language backgrounds and needs of the students in the areas to develop the language."*

It becomes clear from T6's answer, that she reflected seriously upon ELF-related issues and what is more important, she suddenly realized (as she mentioned during our further conversation) that she should reconsider her students' needs. So she must make clear what the needs of her students are, which are the main domains where they use English, how often they come across ELF situations. In this case, we can state that the present research played an important role in ELF-awareness raising.

It was even more encouraging that not only T6 responded positively to the question but T5 as well provided insightful answers on her further inquiries about ELF. *"The questions, of course, incited me to know more about ELF so I looked up in several sources to find out more accurate description of the term"*. Afterwards, T6 provides the following links (<http://www.englishlinguafranca.com/what-is-elf/>; <http://www.tcbok.org/wiki/world-englishes-and-english-as-a-lingua-franca/>) and holds that: *"For me it's like esperanto was. Well, an easier way to reach interaction between peoples. In the teaching practice it could be invested to reach practical goals."*

To the question whether she believed that by incorporating ELF in her teaching practices, her students would benefit from that and improve their communicative skills she responded positively. *"It's an effective means to make students communicate more easily at least they do not have to follow the rules of accurate and fluent speech, here what matters is to convey the meaning. Sure, I think ELF is a useful tool to make the teaching practice more meaningful, effective, to put the emphasis on communication. For me it's a trend of communicative method of teaching, because it bears all the principles of it"*.

Our last interview session was very inspiring as step by step T5 revealed more and more details about ELF. For example, she also talked about the Lingua Franca core and said; *"I know that it is the limit of pronunciation rules that non- native speakers need to know for pronouncing certain sounds, but what are they- do not remember"*. Afterwards, she made another interesting statement, in her view, *"ELF is a useful tool for error correction"*.

Then she interprets it this way; “Do not correct errors unless they impede the meaning”. From her experience, she knew, for example, question formation was a serious issue for many students, they felt anxious and that reflected negatively on their learning outcomes as well as on language use.

6. Conclusion

With regard to the first research question of this study, that is, whether English functions as a lingua franca in Armenian HEIs, the answer seemed to be obvious it does not. Notwithstanding the level of internationalization of Armenia, as it was discussed in section 3.2 above, English was not found to function as a lingua franca, but it did enjoy the status of a highly favoured foreign language. It was without doubt that the importance of the role of English was acknowledged by the teachers, and they reported different instances of using English as a global lingua franca. However, in the majority of the cases, they used it in certain situations, such as academic conferences, which were usually held outside their countries.

Reflecting upon the teachers’ attitudes towards English, it becomes clear that all the respondents had very positive attitudes towards English per se, the English that they had once learned as students and which they now teach to future teachers of English. On a similar positive note, all the respondents seemed to hold the belief that English was important for their career, as it facilitates international communication, conference participation, and internet use.

Nevertheless, the picture was rather different when the replies focused on taking an ELF perspective in their teaching context. First of all, it should be highlighted that the teachers did not seem to be aware of ELF in the first place. This was most probably caused by the lack of ELF-communication within Armenia and within their HEIs in general. It was obvious that the teachers’ lack of awareness of ELF was not a result of their reluctance to accept ELF or to incorporate ELF-informed practices in their teaching. They acknowledged the lingua franca aspect of English, but more often than not this was for specific and limited activities outside the boundaries of their country and university.

With regard to the students’ exposure to ELF, all the teachers firmly agreed that their students were not exposed to ELF. Having said that, there were some exceptions, such as some conference attendance instances and some participation in student exchange programmes. There was thus the impression that the students’ use of English was in general not ample. This could be attributed to two factors. First, the fact that the knowledge of English is not a decisive prerequisite for the country’s internal labour market, and second, the fact that Russian is still strong regarding its role as a regional lingua franca and it manages to cater the regional communicative needs of Armenians.

The attempt to find out whether the present study spurred the teachers’ interest in ELF, definitely revealed two major issues. First, the majority of teachers were not aware of ELF and the research had not any impact on their interests. This can be explained by the fact that like in many other Outer circle countries, where English is taught and learned as EFL, the methods that are used to educate future teachers are so typically EFL-biased and tailor made that they do not give any space for further inquiries and growth. What is more, it should be highlighted that the Armenian socio-education context does not provide an adequate background for ELF communication and, therefore, one cannot expect an increase of interest on ELF-related issues among the researchers and specialists in Armenia. Of course, one can object by stating that many teacher training programmes organized by international educational organizations are being run in Armenia (e.g. the British Council, the American University of Armenia, etc.) and that all the teachers are exposed to trainings and seminars. The only reasonable answer was provided by T5; “When the teachers attend the seminars, everything seems so interesting, everyone so enthusiastic and inspired. Nevertheless, when the training is over and the teachers get back to their classrooms, they do not implicate any of the skills that they were supposed to do. They get back to their routine practices, with the known methods, course books and materials. I cannot explain why, may be because the syllabus requires it, or the parents’ expectations, or the entrance examination...well, I believe it is the system and a couple of seminars cannot change classroom practices”.

Thus, this the second major issue: the teachers must be exposed to new methods, to ELF-related issues, to creativity, innovation and critical thinking when they are students themselves. Our study clearly showed that only two teachers were ELF-aware and open to explore novel concepts and even willing to incorporate them into their teaching practices.

If we look back to their answers, it becomes clear that in these two cases, we have to do with people who continued their postgraduate studies, had abundant exposure to ELF, participated in different training programmes and seminars and had a strong sense of self-development. In the case of T5, she had MA degree at a University, which followed US educational programme, and in the case of T6, she had received numerous grants for study abroad programmes. What is more, T6 is also involved in young political leaders' programmes taking action in a series of trainings and seminars on non-violent conflict resolution thus travelling to many countries and using ELF to the fullest. All things considered, it could be said that it is rather early to talk about ELF in the Armenian educational context for the different reasons discussed above. This inquiry was nevertheless particularly important because it managed to investigate various issues which had to do with the teachers of English in higher education, notably the fact that teaching English to future teachers of English necessarily come along with some imparting of their knowledge and experiences, as well as with their teaching methods and approaches. The teachers' lack of awareness of ELF-related issues in the mainstream research agenda seems to suggest that ELF has still a long way to go until it can become more obvious in the Armenian context.

The results of the study implied that pre-service teacher training programmes should be developed and implicated today in order to prepare ELF-aware teachers of tomorrow. Having said that, the teachers were certainly open-minded and willing to find out more about ELF, which means that they need a better exposure to ELF and other trends in ELT pedagogy. It is our firm belief that English will very soon become a lingua franca in Armenia as well and it is imperative to prepare the students and the population at large for this change. As we talked in 3.2, English is gradually becoming a language of intranational communication between Armenians of Diaspora and Armenians of Armenia, which is another very important factor which should stimulate the ELF-awareness raising. On a personal note, this spurred my motivation to continue this study inspired by the transformative approach to ELF teacher education (cf. Blair 2015, Sifakis 2014). In this connection, the teachers will first be exposed to the theoretical background of ELF in a way that will help them raise their awareness for that matter. In particular, they will be provided with scholarly articles and papers on current trends in ELF research, and they will be given plenty of time to read them and reflect on them with the hope that this will help them shape their own positive attitudes towards ELF. Subsequently, what will be examined is the extent to which the teachers' ELF-awareness will be raised, and the extent to which this ELF-awareness will have affected their teaching practices. Such a study will provide more insights into the teacher transformation processes, thus making its contribution to the current emerging and vibrant research field of ELF.

Acknowledgement: I would like to thank cordially the teachers for their precious time and invaluable contribution to this study, for always being available to answer my innumerable and continuously surging questions and inquires.

	Age	Gender	Teaching experience (years)	Foreign Languages
T1	26	Female	1	Russian, Italian
T2	29	Female	4	Russian, French
T3	29	Female	4	Russian, Spanish
T4	39	Female	12	Russian, French
T5	33	Female	8	Russian, Spanish
T6	32	Female	10	Russian, Italian, Spanish, German

Table 1 Profile of the respondents

References

- Bayyurt, Y. & Akcan, S. (Eds.) (2015). Current perspectives on pedagogy for English as a lingua franca. De Gruyter Mouton: Berlin.
- Blair, A. (2015) Evolving a post-native, multilingual model for ELF-aware teacher education. In Bayyurt, Y. & Akcan, S. (Eds.) *Current perspectives on pedagogy for English as a lingua franca. Developments in English as a Lingua Franca [DELFL]* (5). De Gruyter, Mouton, Berlin, 89-102.
- Brutt-Griffler, J., & Samimy K. K. (1999). Revisiting the colonial in the postcolonial: Critical praxis for non-native English-speaking teachers in a TESOL program. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33(3), 413-432.
- Cogo, A. (2012). ELF and super-diversity: A case study of ELF multilingual practices from a business context. *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca* 1(2): 287-313.
- Cogo, A. (2015). English as a Lingua Franca: descriptions, domains and applications. In H. Bowles & A. Cogo (Eds.) *International Perspectives on English as a Lingua Franca: Pedagogical insights*. Palgrave Macmillan, 1-13.

- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in Education*. New York: Routledge.
- Curry, M J. & Lillis, T. (2004). Multilingual scholars and the imperative to publish in English: Negotiating interests, demands, and rewards. *TESOL Quarterly*, 38(4): 663–688.
- Decke-Cornill, H. (2002). We would have to invent the language we are supposed to teach. The issue of English as lingua franca in language education in Germany. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 15, 1-16.
- Dewey, M. (2012). Towards a post-normative approach: learning the pedagogy of ELF. *Journal of English as a lingua franca*, 3(2), 317-335.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics: quantitative, qualitative and mixed methodologies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fang, F. (2016). Investigating attitudes towards English accents from an ELF framework. *The Asian Journal of Applied Linguistics*. 3 (1), pp. 68-80.
- Firth, A. (1996). The discursive accomplishment of normality: On ‘lingua franca’ English and conversation analysis. *Journal of Pragmatics* 26(2), 237–259.
- Friedrich, P. (2000). English in Brazil: functions and attitudes. *World Englishes*, 19(2), 215-223.
- Hülbauer, C. (2007). You moved, aren't? The relationship between lexicogrammatical correctness and communicative effectiveness in English as a lingua franca. *Views* 16(2), 3-36.
- Hovhannisyan, I. (2016). Could we speak about ELF in Armenia? An exploration of Armenian adult EFL speakers' attitudes towards English. In N. Tsantila, J. Mandalios & M. Ilkos (Eds.), *ELF: Pedagogical and interdisciplinary perspectives* (pp. 201- 211). Athens: Deree – The American College of Greece.
- Jenkins J. (2012). English as a Lingua Franca from the classroom to the classroom. *ELT Journal*, 66(4), 486-494.
- Jenkins, J. (2007). *English as a lingua franca: Attitude and identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jokilehto, E. (2014). ELF in the classroom: Finnish upper secondary school students' attitudes towards ELF, Unpublished MA thesis, University of Jyväskylä.
- Kachru, B. (1990). *The alchemy of English: the spread, functions, and models of non-native Englishes*, University of Illinois Press.
- Lai, Hsuan-Yau (2008) *Learning English as a international language or not? A study of Taiwanese students' motivation and perceptions*. PhD thesis, University of Warwick.
- Matsuda, A. (2003). The ownership of English in Japanese secondary schools. *World Englishes*, 22(4), 483-496.
- Mauranen, A. K. (2015). *New Frontiers in Teaching and Learning English*. 21 p. 2.
- Mauranen, A.K., Perez-Llantada, C. & Swales, J.M. (2010). Academic Englishes. A standardized knowledge? In Kirkpatrick, A. (Ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of World Englishes*. London: Routledge, 634-652.
- Meierkord, C. (2002) ‘Language stripped bare’ or ‘linguistic masala’? Culture in lingua franca conversation. In K. Knapp & C. Meierkord (eds.) *Lingua Franca Communication*. Frankfurt/Main: Lang, 109-133.
- Pözl, U. & Seidlhofer, B. (2006). In and on their own terms. The “habitat factor” in English as a lingua franca interactions. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 177, 151-17.
- Rahman, S. (2005). Orientations and Motivation in English Language Learning: a Study of Bangladeshi Students at Undergraduate Level. *Asian EFL Journal*, 7(1), 1-26.
- Seidlhofer, B. (2011). *Understanding English as a lingua franca*. Oxford: OUP.
- Ranta, E. (2010). English in the real world vs. English at school: Finnish English teachers' and students' views. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* [online] 20(2), 156-177.
- Sifakis, N. & Sougari, A.-M. (2003). Facing the globalisation challenge in the realm of English language teaching. *Language and Education*, 17(1), 59-71.
- Sifakis, N. & Sougari, A.-M. (2005). Pronunciation issues and EIL pedagogy in the periphery: A survey of Greek state school teachers' beliefs. *TESOL Quarterly*, 39(3), 467-488.
- Sifakis, N. (2014). ELF awareness as an opportunity for change: a transformative perspective for ESOL teacher education. *Journal of English as a lingua franca*, 1(1), 141-170.
- Sougari, A. M. & Sifakis, N. C. (2007). Intercultural education through the EFL lens – what do teachers think? In Boers, Franc, Darqueens, J., Temmerman, R. (Eds). *Multilingualism and Applied Comparative Linguistics*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 193-211.
- Spolsky, B. (1969). Attitudinal aspects of second language learning. *Language Learning* 19, 272-283.
- Timmis, I. (2002). Native-speaker norms and International English: a classroom view. *ELT Journal*, 56(3), 240-249.
- Wang, W. (2015). Chinese university students' ELF-awareness: impacts of language education in China. *Englishes in Practice*, 2(4), 86-106.
- Widdowson, H. G. (1994). The ownership of English. *TESOL Quarterly*, 28(2), 377-389.
- Xu, J. and Van de Poel, K. (2011). English as a Lingua Franca in Flanders. A study of university students' attitudes. *English Text Construction* [online] 4 (2), 257-278.
- Young, T. J. and Walsh, S. (2010). Which English? Whose English? An investigation of ‘non-native’ teachers' beliefs about target varieties. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 23(2), 123-137.
- Zhang, Y., & Wildemuth, B. M. (2009). Qualitative analysis of content. Applications of Social Research Methods to Questions in Information and Library Science. [Electronic version]. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 308-19.
- Zolyan, S., Astvatsatryan, M., Topuzyan, A., Gevorgyan, N., Terzyan, Khachatryan, S., Melkonyan, K., Jraghatspanyan, A. and Ayunts, B. (2008). *Language education policy profile. County report: Armenia*. RA Ministry of Education and Science, Yerevan State Linguistic University after V. Brusov.