English as an International Language and English Language Teaching: The Theory vs. Practice Divide

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A B S T R A C T

English as an international language (EIL) is considered by applied linguists to be a new paradigm for research, practice and English language teaching (ELT). However, it appears that English language teachers have little voice in these discussions, and the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom has remained largely unaffected by EIL, hinging upon the native speaker (NS) ideal. This is hardly surprising as insufficient attention has been devoted to EIL pedagogy, and to helping teachers integrate theoretical understandings of EIL into their teaching. This paper aims to address this gap by examining EFL teachers' (non-native speakers - NNS) perspectives on the implications of EIL for classroom practice. Through an analysis of data gathered from an online questionnaire and 10 semi-structured interviews, this study examined the attitudes of 53 EFL teachers working in Croatian public schools towards: a) the EIL paradigm, b) NS/NNS models in ELT, and c) the implications of EIL for language teaching. The findings show that although the teachers are familiar with and open to the notion of EIL, when conceptualized as a paradigm for teaching, it becomes a rather elusive concept, and a second best NNS English. Overall, the teachers are largely unaware of the potential of EIL for ELT, and rely on the NS as the benchmark and authority. They maintain that the EIL theory-ELT practice link is complex and difficult to operationalise. It is argued that, if EIL is to become a new paradigm for teaching, greater collaboration is required between applied linguists and ELF teachers, and explicit guidelines are needed to help teachers integrate EIL into ELT.

Keywords: EFL teacher; EIL paradigm; ELT; native speaker; NS English; NNS Englishes

A R T I C L E   H I S T O R Y

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The EIL and ELT divide

In recent years, English as an International Language (EIL) has been attracting much attention in applied linguistics, and is claimed to have brought about "a paradigm shift in TESOL and SLA" (Marlina, 2014; Sharifian, 2009, p. 2). As a new "paradigm for thinking, research and practice" (Sharifian, 2009, p. 2), it represents a linguistic or epistemological "tool" for researchers, scholars and educators to reconsider the concept of English, reevaluate approaches in TESOL, and reexamine pedagogical strategies for English language teaching (ELT) (Marlina, 2014). In this respect, research on EIL challenges the very models, values and ideology on which the TESOL profession is premised (Holliday, 2005; McKay, 2002).

Theoretical considerations about EIL have shed light on the status of English, the nature of the language, and the fact that English is more widely used in multilingual contexts for communication among non-native speakers (NNS) than among its native-speakers (NS) (Graddol, 1999; Kirkpatrick, 2014; Marlina, 2014; McKay, 2012). This changing "ownership of English" has sparked debates about the extent to which English belongs to the NSs as all the people who speak the language can claim rights to it (Marlina, 2017; McKay, 2003; Smith, 1976; Widdowson, 1994). Not only has the examination of the "native speaker fallacy" brought into question the authority of the NS (Phillipson, 1992) and the appropriateness of the NS linguistic ideal (Jenkins, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2000), but it has also raised a dilemma about which varieties should be taught, and which speaker should serve as an instruction model (Selvi & Yazan, 2013; Tajeddin & Adeh, 2016).

Given these changes and variations (cf. Seidlhofer, 2008), applied linguists believe traditional conceptualizations of the English language, and, by implication, the NS models are no longer realistic or particularly relevant to the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom (cf. Mahboob, 2005). It is claimed that "EIL poses entirely new assumptions for the teaching and learning of English" (McKay, 2002, p. 25), redefines the language teaching model based on the monolingual/monocultural NS (Jenkins, 2006), and changes teachers' and learners' sense of competence and expertise (Llurda, 2009; Modiano, 2009). Generally speaking, EIL is alleged to be a more authentic and relevant framework for ELT (Modiano, 2009).

Although this may be (socio)linguistically true, the pedagogical reality seems somewhat different. While applied linguists are critical towards language education professionals whose current practices are not in line with the research on EIL (Matsuda, 2012a), teachers, for their part, are largely unaware of the EIL debates and the implications of EIL for ELT (Maley, 2010). Features of EIL which intrigue linguists, can cause concern and confusion among practitioners (Matsuda, 2012a). What is more, EFL teachers are increasingly criticized for adhering to the outdated NS model, yet are not given ideas or practical suggestions where and how to implement changes in the classroom. The rather broad EIL teaching principles are not necessarily deemed to be relevant or applicable in all EFL contexts (cf. McKay & Brown, 2016). As a result, teachers are uncertain how to operationalize EIL, though aware they should make changes to their teaching (Matsuda, 2012a).

In view of the present situation, it seems fair to question what has led to the disparity between theorists and practitioners. One plausible explanation is that applied linguists (researchers) have their own theoretical concerns, and teachers have to meet quite different demands in the classroom (Maley, 2010). However, best practices cannot be developed separately as theory and practice are interdependent in ELT (Kumaravdivelu, 2003; Seidlhofer & Widdowson, 1998), and a formal body of knowledge should have some utility within a social context. Another problem that arises in the classroom is that EIL scholars look at "real-life English language" from the communicative perspective, whereas educators conceptualize English in terms of "linguistic

standardisation" and norms (Sifakis, 2004, p. 242). Finally, it is well known that the contentious NS has been widely used as a benchmark for knowledge about language (Davies, 2003), and represents an ideal in ELT (Drljača Margić & Vodopija-Krstanović, 2018; Nguyen, 2017; Vodopija-Krstanović, 2011), whereas the pedagogical aspect of EIL has been relatively neglected in the classroom.

In view of the fact that much of ELT still seems to be modeled on "native-speaker norms" (Seidlhofer, 2000, p. 52), discussions about teaching EIL (Holliday, 2005; McKay, 2002; Modiano, 2009; Sharifian, 2009) would merit from more bottom-up practitioner-oriented approaches deriving out of different ELT contexts around the world. First-hand reports on the role of EIL in ELT, or on the challenges practitioners face when attempting to incorporate EIL would provide insights into how theoretical perspectives can be integrated into classroom practice, making it more relevant to ELT professionals. A juxtaposition of EIL scholars' and practitioners' perspectives could promote not only a broader understanding of EIL relative to ELT, but possibly also bridge the gap between theorists' and researchers' assumptions and findings, and teachers' knowledge and practice (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). However, there are difficulties in informing EFL teachers about EIL, and "prompting them to bring about (smaller or broader) change to the ways that they have been teaching" (Sifakis, Lopriore, Dewey, Bayyurt, Vettorel, Cavalheiro, Siqueira, Kordia., 2018, p. 2). What EFL teachers need are practical guidelines for teaching different types of English, standards (norms and benchmarks), and simple pedagogically feasible principles (Marlina, 2014).

This being the case, it is not surprising that, among English language teachers, EIL raises concerns about its operationalisation and practical relevance, and about which variety of English to use as a model, and whose culture to teach (Sharifian, 2014). Given that the potential implications of EIL for teaching are considered to be a local matter (Kirkpatrick, 2014; Seidlhofer, 2001; Seidlhofer, 2005; Sharifian, 2014), more emic research is needed from different contexts across the world to foster understandings of how to design an effective EIL pedagogy (cf. Jenkins, 2012). As context is a crucial aspect in teacher development, such research would reveal whether and how EIL pedagogy is actualized in different teaching realities, and generate new ideas for ELT (Bayyurt & Sifakis, 2017).

With this in mind, this study aims to give voice to the central figures in the EIL debate (cf. Marlina, 2017), to contextualize the EIL controversies and derive understanding arising out of a specific educational context in Croatia, thus contributing to the wider ongoing dialogue on teaching and operationalising EIL. Although EIL is an interesting new paradigm for ELT (Sharifian, 2009), in our particular context, teachers still shy away from EIL as it is considered too elusive to have significant practical utility, and to effectively inform teacher education (cf. Bayyurt & Sifakis, 2017). As long as ELT relies on the standardization of language according to native forms, and success as a second language teacher depends upon the ability to approximate those norms (Jenkins, Cogo & Dewey, 2011), EIL will remain a highly controversial issue. This point is taken up in greater detail in the study.

The intersection of EIL and ELT

The multifacetedness of English and its different actualizations in the postmodern reality have been widely discussed with reference to different terms: Global English (Crystal, 2003), World Englishes (Kachru, 1996; Kirkpatrick, 2007), English as an International Language (Modiano, 2001; Sharifian, 2009), English as a Lingua Franca (Jenkins, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2003a), and post-geographic Englishes (James, 2008), to name a few. These concepts have contributed to the

raising of awareness of the nonmonolithic nature of English, but have also caused substantial confusion in the field. Given that it is not always clear as to what is understood by the concepts, for the purpose of this study, it might be useful to briefly clarify the notion of EIL.

Contrary to popular belief, EIL is not a codified unitary variety (Marlina, 2014; Seidlhofer, 2003b; Sharifian, 2009) and does not refer to a particular variety of English (Baker, 2015; Jenkins, 2012; Kirkpatrick, 2014; Seidlhofer, 2003b; Sharifian, 2009). The English language "does not travel well" and EIL is not (a franchise) distributed unchanged across the world (Widdowson, 2003, p. 46), instead, the language spreads and as such it is "variously actualized" in different contexts (Widdowson, 2003, p. 49). Following this view, in this paper EIL is understood as English in lingua franca use, as a "function that English performs in multilingual context" and the two concepts will be used interchangeably (Friedrich & Matsuda, 2010, p. 20). Although "ELF researchers prefer the term English as a lingua franca to English as an international language […], both terms are currently in use" (Jenkins 2006, p. 160).

In educational contexts, ELT relies on some form of standard (Holliday, 2005; Jenkins, 2012; McKay, 2002) and uses NS norms from inner circle countries as benchmarks for students (Holliday, 2005; Holliday, 2006; McKay, 2002). For this reason, there is a growing need to further discuss pedagogical issues, raise awareness of EIL among practitioners and students, and finally "bring together theory and practice" (Sifakis *et al.* 2018). Although an increase in the number of books dedicated to teaching EIL has been noted (Marlina, 2014), and studies have shown that the native speaker model is not the aim of ELT (Keshavarz, 2017), native-speaker ideology prevails, and curricula are still largely modeled on the monolingual/monocultural NS (Jenkins, 2012; McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008). Therefore, efforts should be made to help teachers replace the normative mindset (Seidlhofer, 2008), and reflect on the possible implications of EIL on ELT (cf. Sifakis *et al.*, 2018). However, it should also be borne in mind that beliefs about teaching are not changed easily, even when teachers are provided with the necessary evidence (Spicer-Escalante & de Jonge-Kannar, 2014).

In actuality, at present, problems still arise because the NS linguistic model is widely used as a point of reference, regardless of the fact that English is a pluricentric language and that today's communication is plurilinguistic (Marlina, 2014). Realistically speaking, the EFL classroom does not promote the acceptance and equal treatment of all varieties, nor does it necessarily focus on developing students' ability to communicate across cultures in the international context. Furthermore, there are few "EFL-oriented materials" (Jenkins, 2012, p. 493; Matsuda, 2012b) and ELT textbooks cover a limited selection of settings, cultural representations and center on "Anglophone cultures" (Baker, 2015, p. 21; McKay, 2003, p.38). Also, EIL has had little impact on language testing (Canagarajah, 2006; Davies, 2009; Hu, 2012) as ELT has not adopted a plurithic approach that distinguishes (student) errors from creative language forms (Grazzi, 2017). As for pronunciation, although the main teaching aims is "to enable learners to establish and maintain communication with native and non-native speakers of English alike in an intelligible manner" (Keshavarz, 2017, p.2), it is doubtful whether this is and can be realized in the classroom. Let us now take a closer look at the EIL/ELT divide in the context under study.

ELT in the Croatian context

In the Croatian context, ELT is largely affected by five factors: a) the *National Curriculum Framework for Pre-School Education, General Compulsory and Secondary Education* (NCF, 2010), b) the national school-leaving examinations (the *Matura*), c) EFL coursebooks, d) the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR, 2001), and e) EFL teacher education programmes. As expected, the native speaker and British and American English (language and culture) underlie

all the relevant educational documents in the country, the crucial being the NCF (NCF, 2010). The NCF provides guidelines to practitioners at all educational levels and types of schools, directs foreign language education and sets a framework for syllabus design for teaching English through all four skills (listening, reading, speaking, writing) and culture. Equally significant is the national school-leaving exam, the *Matura,* with its tremendous washback effect on ELT and the EFL classroom. The foreign language exam is mandatory at the *Matur*a, and in the summer term 2017/2018, out of 35,891 high school students who sat for the examination, the majority (31,381) opted for English (National Centre for the External Evaluation of Education, 2018). The third important factor is the fact that the Ministry of Science and Education has to approve all English language coursebooks used in the public education sector, the majority of which are written by either native English-speaking authors or in collaboration with their Croatian peers, and are put out by local or UK-based publishers (see Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Croatia Website, 2019). Fourth if we take a brief look at the seminal *Common European Framework* (CEFR, 2001), there seems to be a considerable degree of inconsistency in the role of the NS. On the one hand, caution is expressed in statements like the "ideal native speaker" should not be taken "as the ultimate model" (CEFR, 2001, p. 5), and on the other hand, the independent user is expected to be able to "…interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party" (CEFR, 2001, p. 24). Similarly, the C2 user should be able to understand language spoken at "fast native speed" (CEFR, 2001, p. 27), and it is expected that the B2 user should "sustain relationships with native speakers without unintentionally amusing or irritating them or requiring them to behave other than they would with a native speaker" (CEFR, 2001, p. 76). It should be mentioned here that the CEFR Companion Volume with New Descriptors (2018) has moved away from the idealized native speaker and terms such as the "well-educated native speaker" and "near-native speaker" have been replaced by "speakers of the target language" or "proficient speakers" (CEFR Companion Volume, 2018, p 217). However, in our particular context, the original descriptors in the 2001 CEFR focusing on "a native speaker norm" have exerted influence on language and education policy for sixteen years, and it cannot be expected that this will change instantaneously. Furthermore, debates surrounding the NS are relevant only to English but the CEFR is used as a point of reference for other languages as well.

A final case in point is the fact that the vast majority of EFL teachers have graduated from TEFL programmes in the country, where, only as of recently have content courses been offered on global English, EIL, ELF and World Englishes. However, paradoxically, NS English remains the language model and benchmark in these programmes. If teacher educators do not implement approaches to teaching EIL, how can graduates and EFL teachers be expected to incorporate EIL into ELT (cf. Matsuda, 2017)? Clearly, there is a gap between theoretical assumptions and practical guidelines, and though there is a critical awareness of the constraints of the NS model in theory, it is nonetheless taken up as a central reference point in practice. However, teacher education programmes can promote change in teachers' beliefs, knowledge and practice (Clark-Goff & Eslami, 2016), and thus influence their preference for the NS model.

In the light of the discussions so far, it seems fair to state that in our particular context, questions need to be raised whether the NS should be used as a model for our students who are, by implication, EIL users (cf. Cook, 1999; Kirkpatrick, 2014; McKay 2003), or that given the different varieties of English (cf. Jenkins, Cogo & Dewey, 2011), it should serve as a yardstick to evaluate students' knowledge of the language. If it is believed that EIL empowers both language learners and ELT practitioners (Llurda, 2009; Marlina 2017), why then is EIL not pedagogically functional (in Europe) (Modiano, 2009), and has not had a significant impact on ELT (Jenkins, 2007)?

It is with these reflections that this study attempts to develop understandings of the pedagogical aspect of EIL, and determine whether the research and perspectives presented by EIL scholars are relevant for practice and practitioners in our EFL context.

Method

Working framework for data interpretation

The frameworks used to analyze and interpret the data are derived from: a) the EIL paradigm discussed above, b) the interpretivist paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Holliday, 2002), and c) the pragmatics of language pedagogy (Widdowson, 1990). The interpretivist paradigm is premised on the understanding that all interpretations are located in a particular context and negotiated through conversation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Knowledge is believed to be socially constructed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) and the experiences (of participants) are described and interpreted in a context-specific setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

As for the "reflexive, interdependent relationship between theory and practice" (Widdowson, 1990, p. 30), theory affects and benefits from practice and what happens in the language classroom should inform theory. "Applied linguistics, as a mediating area of enquiry, which seeks to establish the relevance of theory to practice, needs to take note of developments in theoretical and descriptive linguistics" (Seidlhofer & Widdowson, 1998, p. 1). Similarly, the pragmatics of language pedagogy is premised on the need to "[work] out a reflexive, interdependent relationship between theory and practice" whereby theory is realized in practice and practice is informed by theory" (Widdowson, 1990, p. 30). Teaching is seen as an act of "pedagogic mediation" of: a) appraisal or consideration of ideas with one's own terms of reference and evaluation of their relevance, and b) their application to the practical domain (Widdowson, 1990, p. 30).

In brief, the interpretive paradigm and the pragmatics of language pedagogy framework will be used to glean insights into the participant's own frame of reference as to what extent EIL is and can be integrated into ELT.

Aims and Research Questions

The aim of the study is to explore EFL teachers' perspectives of EIL and the extent to which the EIL paradigm is feasible for classroom practice.

The research questions which guided this study are as follows:

RQ 1: What are teachers' attitudes towards EIL?

RQ 2 What is the teachers' position regarding EIL and NNS/NS (models) in ELT?

RQ 3: What are the possible implications of EIL for language teaching?

Research Methods

In this study we used the mixed method approach (Creswell, 2003) comprising data obtained from two sources: an online questionnaire investigating teacher understanding of EIL, and the impact of EIL on teaching in the EFL classroom, and follow-up semi-structured interviews which further investigated and elicited clarification on key issues. The anonymous online questionnaire was administered via the Croatian Association of Teachers of English Facebook

profile, and using the snowball sampling technique, the link to the questionnaire was further sent to other EFL teachers.

The questionnaire comprised two sections: teachers' familiarity with EIL and their attitudes towards EIL and NS/NNS models, (i.e. varieties of English), and the possibility of teaching EIL.

The first part investigated the participants' attitudes towards the NS model and its effect on teaching and learning. More precisely, ten Likert-type questions investigated whether the NS model played an important role in the ELT curriculum. Four Likert-type questions enquired into the participants' attitudes towards NS vs. NNS Englishes, as well as their viewpoints on correctness, familiarity, and the acceptability of these Englishes for international communication. Two multiple-choice questions elicited what Englishes students should be exposed to in the EFL classroom, and at what level.

The next part enquired into teachers' familiarity with and attitudes towards EIL. Specifically, four Likert-type questions looked at teachers' attitudes towards familiarity, usefulness and appropriateness of teaching EIL, and whether it was more appropriate to teach EIL or some other variety. Two open-ended questions asked the respondents to explain the concept of EIL and its implications for teaching English. The respondents were also asked whether they thought the Ministry of Science and Education should provide guidelines on teaching English varieties at the national level and to further elaborate on their responses.

The second set of data was obtained from semi-structured interviews which further explored the notion of EIL, elicited the participants' perspectives of the role of EIL in the EFL classroom, and whether and how EIL could be incorporated into teaching, i.e. whether the EIL paradigm could be integrated into classroom practice. The questions were led by an interview guide; however, topical trajectories in the conversation were also followed to identify different ways of seeing and understanding the topic by EFL teachers. The interviews lasted anywhere from 60 to 120 minutes. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The coding was done by repeated reading of the data and grouping of topics until categories emerged, such as the following five themes: a) conceptualizations of EIL, b) the role of EIL in teaching, c) integration of EIL into teaching, d) EIL and NS ideology and e) familiarity with NS English. The written and oral comments are reproduced in their original form and were not edited by the authors.

The Participants and Context

The sample in both studies comprised non-native English speaking EFL teachers (NNESTs) in public elementary and secondary schools. A total of 53 EFL teachers completed the questionnaire. The respondents' teaching experience varied, from several months to 32 years (10.86 years on average). The sampling for the 10 interviews was done by convenience and the participants were EFL teachers in public schools, with teaching experience ranging from ranging from 2 to 19 years. The majority of these teachers were mentors in TEFL pre-service training programmes.

Findings and discussion

Understandings of EIL

The findings suggest that the overwhelming majority of teachers (92.3%) are familiar with the notion of EIL and find it appropriate for international communication. The vast majority (72.99%) of them maintain that it would be useful to teach EIL in the EFL classroom, although less than a half (42.3%) state that "today it is more appropriate to teach EIL than any other variety of English". However, more than two-thirds of the participants (70.7%) would like to have guidelines for teaching EIL.

The participants appear to be familiar with EIL, when considering the notion in the abstract, i.e., at a theoretical level; however, when asked to further expand on the concept by looking at concrete aspects of EIL, the majority remain perplexed, as can be seen from the extract: "I don't know what it means exactly. Is it some English variety, is it a different accent? Does it have grammar rules I can teach?"

Some even consider it to be a corrupted form of English which diverges from the mainstream NS model and is used by NNS of English by default. They believe "it is just English that's not very good" or is "the best what you can do and then this is called EIL". Likewise they associate EIL with different NNS accents and explain that "we use this anyway as we don't know better."

To some degree the results could be seen as contradictory. While the respondents state to be familiar with the concept of EIL, they associate it with NNS accents, and incorrect English, and strongly support an inner circle variety and native-like proficiency. The discrepancy might indicate lack of familiarity with the rather elusive concept of EIL, and lack of consensus regarding its value. In fact, some seem to view it as a distinct variety of English which is not associated with a particular country and, as such, is international and intelligible to all, for example: "A variety of English which in its tone, accent, pronunciation, etc. does not represent any country in particular, but is rather quite neutral." or "English that is most understandable across the world."

It is interesting that EIL is considered to be a variety in its own right used by the NNSs, which suggests that the respondents are unaware that English is actualized differently, and that EIL is not a specific variety: "A variant of English used among non native speakers of English, at an international level.", "Blended language used in international communication." or "English with no strong accent as to be understood worldwide...". Overall, EIL is perceived through tangible aspects of English such as accents, language models and varieties.

They also describe EIL from the functional perspective. Here its role is viewed as positive due to its focus on communication, getting the message across and bridging the gap between NNS around the globe:

"Stress on the ability to communicate in different situations with different people when your languages do not 'overlap'?"

"This is English spoken all over world, where people from different countries (not necessarily English speaking countries) use English as the language of communication beetwen them."

"I think we have already accepted it, whether we like it or not. It is the LINGUA FRANCA of today. "

"…is a variety of English that is the most understandable across the world."

On a more positive note, EIL is viewed as something that connects people across different vocations enabling them to communicate without obstacles. Nevertheless, it is considered "simplified English" catering for people's needs when NS varieties fail.

"The use of the English language as a common means of communication across cultures (a lingua franca), makes English more accessible to people from all over the world, i.e. simplified English)."

"It is the language used in various professions."

The fact that EIL is used and appropriated across the world by its users has also been suggested by the participants.

"English has become adopted by the world and as it is a living language it is being formed by its users who are not solely from English speaking countries."

"English is the most common foreign language to learn. It is important to speak it easily, without thinking about grammar rules or if we speak American or British accent."

"It's important to communicate the meaning, while accent, for example, isn't important."

Interestingly, their answers also reveal a rather negative attitude towards EIL as only being relevant to researchers in the ivory towers of academia, rather than to real life professionals in the ELT classroom. The following responses corroborate the theory practice divide, and suggest that the teachers and their learners are neither familiar with, nor interested in (the debates surrounding) EIL.

"EIL is only an interesting curiosity in programs at universities. The right English is British English and then American English. Who is interested in EIL other than some linguists? The people who learn English don't really care, they just want to be very fluent and accurate. The more the better."

In the light of the above, it would seem that although teachers claim to be familiar with EIL, there does not seem to be consensus regarding the notion and the majority of responses indicate a possible lack of familiarity or interest for EIL. For some practitioners, "this question is too difficult", and it should then come as no surprise that EIL is removed from classroom reality.

The Implications of EIL for Language Teaching

If we look at EIL and varieties of English, the vast majority of the participants (70.45%) believe students should be exposed to both NS and NNS Englishes in the classroom, while only 2.27% of them think that they should be exposed to a single NS English variety. The fact that the great majority support the exposure to various Englishes in the EFL classroom might indicate that the teachers are familiar with the role and status of the English language today. Nevertheless, the majority still believe in the uncontested NS model. In fact, 75% of participants claim that students should be taught NS models and "students with a more native-like accent are perceived as more proficient". When asked to rate whether students should be familiarized with both NS and NNS Englishes and native and non-native accents, American English scored highest (4) and they did not agree that students should be exposed to NNS accents, such as Indian (2.88), Brazilian (2.88), Swedish (2.61), and German (2.58).

As for when students should be introduced to various Englishes, the largest number believe that different Englishes should be introduced to students at the intermediate (54.55%) and upper intermediate level (27.27%), whereas only 13.64% think that beginners should be familiarized with different Englishes, as they should focus exclusively on NS varieties. Interestingly, one teacher remarked that students should not be introduced to NNS Englishes or exposed to NNS accents in the classroom at all because they are inevitably exposed to them in the outside world. For this reason, the classroom should be reserved for NS accents only.

As for the respondents' perspectives on the implications of EIL for language teaching, they can be divided into four groups: uninformed, positive, negative and ambivalent. Some respondents admit that they do not know what implications EIL could have for ELT, hence, indicating they are quite oblivious of the current discussions in the field.

"This question is too difficult for me. "

"I'm not really sure. "

"I have no idea, still they need to know grammar to use it as an international language and accents are a bonus. "

Another group of respondents caution about the negative aspects of EIL's potentially damaging effect on classroom practice as it would entail deviating from the standard and teaching second best English.

"Devastating, we should have a constant to fall back on."

"Ignoring other varieties of English"

Some also have ambivalent opinions about the implications and are able to see both the advantages and the disadvantages of EIL for teaching. On the positive side, they emphasize:

"Tolerance for different accents, but also mistakes; there are always pros and cons",

"English as International Language … students should be given the choice of other non-native English accents (depending on their needs, their non-native speakers and country/culture they're from) and in that way neglect other important features of native accents (the ones they don't really need for intelligible conversation)."

On the other hand "different accents can cause misunderstanding, confusion, uncontrollable language changes". One of the teachers also expressed uncertainty about teaching EIL as "it becomes more difficult to decide what kind of pronunciation is acceptable and what kind of pronunciation is not". Furthermore, he/she questions whether "the only important feature of any language is simply to convey a message successfully". Although the teachers' answers display a range of different attitudes, there seems to be an overall lack of familiarity with EIL, unawareness of the direct implications of EIL for ELT, and perplexity as to how to utilize the data gathered by EIL researchers/theoreticians in the classroom.

As for which NS and NNS Englishes they consider best for ELT, as expected, NS Englishes expectedly took precedence over non-native ones. The first two positions were taken predominantly by British and American English, with the majority (57.14%) opting for British English as the best for ELT, whereas American English was rated second best (51.43%). Other

NS Englishes (Australian and Canadian English) took the third and fourth place, respectively. The diversity of answers increased towards the fifth position to include a number of NNS Englishes. Notably, Indian and Swedish English are the most prevalent as the fifth best. Indian was possibly chosen because of its association with Britain, and Swedish due to the high status of English-proficient Scandinavian countries. Some even mentioned that it was acceptable to use Croatian–English, thus acknowledging the inevitable influence of the native language and use of translanguaging in ELT.

Regarding the practical guidelines on teaching EIL, the majority (63.64%) believe that the guidelines should be provided by the Ministry of Science and Education as they would ensure uniformity and simplify teaching in the EFL classroom.

"Because teachers need to know what and how to teach."

"Because it would be easier for teachers to properly introduce this important part of the language."

"They should be given to provide support for teachers."

"Guidelines would at least make teaching pronunciation more visible and open up a discussion, which would lead to positive changes and more attention paid to teaching and assessing pronunciation."

"To have similar attitude in the whole country."

"It would be easier for teachers, but I think they should not be too strict about it."

However, a minority of the respondents (36.36%), do not agree that guidelines should be issued because they might prove counterproductive for both teachers and learners. It seems that these respondents believe more freedom should be left to cater to learners' specific needs and desires. "Guidlines would make it tiresome for the teachers and obligatory for students which could be a JOY-KILL."

"It's not essential. Who is interested in them, will learn."

"Because there in no right or wrong "

EIL and NS models in Classroom Practice

Models of English are a quite tangible area of EFL, and can best be perceived through varieties, pronunciation and accents which can be incorporated in the ELT syllabus, and which students can be asked to follow or imitate. Other aspects, however, are more elusive and, overall, the respondents express their concern about teaching EIL and how to bring this concept into the EFL classroom. The underlying reason is that the EIL paradigm challenges current teaching practices and diverges from national EFL guidelines. One participant succinctly explained the concerns voiced by many: "I don't know anything about how to teach EIL or what to teach."

Another respondent holds the same point of view and explains "EIL best describes the language that non-native English teachers use"; however, he/she is uncertain how to approach it in the classroom and is worried about its non-standardized form affecting aspects of ELT. "We NNSs probably use EIL by default, when we talk among ourselves a wannabe English … but teaching EIL is a different matter. How do I teach it? EIL grammar, EIL vocabulary….? I would teach EIL if I explicitly knew what and how…"

It has also been suggested that if EIL is to be integrated in the EFL classroom, it should be formally incorporated in the national EFL teacher training programmes. "Include teaching EIL in AZOO (Teacher Training and Development Agency) programmes, then we will do it."

Because the teachers are familiar with and educated in British and American English, and classes are benchmarked on the NS ideal, it is unlikely that they will, or are able to teach other varieties. Furthermore, these standards represent a security blanket, and limit the number of varieties to a manageable two. "In our language classes, we teach British and American language and culture or maybe just a combination because it's all mixed up today. This is the tradition. This is how I was taught and how I learned what else can I teach?"

As can be seen, one of the reasons why EIL is not integrated in the classroom is that teachers were taught NS English which, as mentioned, underlies all MA in TEFL programs in the country.

"I studied about British English and American, even Canadian and Australian or Irish are not so familiar to me. It becomes a problem because students expect their teachers to know everything and so I like to stick to what I'm familiar with."

"The English we learned at school and the one we use in reality maybe is different but is the only one we know. So this is the way it is why, why should I now try to change on purpose and do something new, why and what is this something? Why?"

As for the impact of EIL on the teaching of the four skills, grammar, vocabulary and culture, the teachers maintain that the teaching of culture could be affected by EIL. Although in many of the course books used culture focuses on inner circle countries, they believe it would be possible to include other cultures from the international context and Croatian culture as well. "EIL is easiest maybe even only possible when it comes to culture, with the internet we become more and more aware of different cultures, and we could watch movies, reading also some articles or literature from other countries. Look at tourism in Croatia."

However, teaching the four skills, grammar and vocabulary is believed to be a more complex issue, and although it might be possible to adapt teaching materials, it would be best if all adhered to the standard. Near-native proficiency should be the ultimate goal in the classroom, as can be seen in the following extract.

"Writing has to be done a certain way, we don't write essays in Croatian so they should write proper English and not write English like they are writing Croatian. Grammar is impossible to connect with EIL, it is just incorrect English. English is difficult enough for non-native teachers, how am I supposed to know all the varieties? They are not really important for us."

Furthermore, given the national *Matura* exams and formal requirements, teaching EIL would not be particularly useful to the students. Moreover, it could even be potentially harmful. In the teachers' opinion, the positive implications of EIL have yet to be determined.

"Everything is based on the NS … materials, tests, language, just everything. NS standard is everywhere and nothing else counts. If I tell my students that they don't need to be accurate, would I be doing them a favor in reality."

And finally, they explain that because our students are surrounded by EIL in real life, the classroom should focus on the standard and NS models and proficiency.

"We use EIL all the time the teachers, the students, the people outside, why do we have to bother with it in the classroom. It complicates everything. We have to worry about so many things, testing, making classes interesting, activities … who really cares about EIL. What am I doing wrong if I teach British and American English?"

Concluding Remarks and Implications

Although findings in this study suggest that teachers are familiar with the notion of EIL, they seem to be rather unaware of how to integrate EIL into practice, or why it is considered to be a new paradigm for teaching. Some even question the purpose and benefits of introducing EIL into standard practice. Our study corroborates that, to the teachers, the NS ideal and linguistic standardization and norms represent the very foundation of ELT (cf. Sifakis, 2004). The NS model, although claimed to be irrelevant and disempowering (Holliday, 2005; Jenkins, 2012; Kramsch, 1988; Marlina 2017; McKay 2010; Seidlhofer, 2001), is still "[prominent] in language teaching" (Cook, 1999, p. 185. In the same way, when it comes to teaching varieties of English, teachers favour standard British and American, which are largely considered to be the most appropriate (cf. Jenkins, 2000; Vodopija-Krstanović & Brala-Vukanovic, 2011; Vodopija-Krstanović & Brala-Vukanovic, 2012). What the teachers are most familiar with are British and American English, as they are widely taught in teacher education programmes, and upheld by teaching materials. From the practitioner's perspective, one of the main challenges EIL poses is that of description, which is not available for ELT. Teaching is concerned with acquiring language proficiency and assessment. Furthermore, given that EIL is used in the EFL classroom and the international environment by default, they question why it should be given additional attention in the curriculum.

If EIL were to become relevant for classroom practice, there need to be specific teaching guidelines and greater collaboration between applied linguists and practitioners. The growing interest in EIL will lead to further growth of this research field. However, measures should be taken to bring the field closer to teachers, include it in teacher education programmes, and to make it relevant enough to consider ways to integrate EIL into classroom practice, assessment, course books, curricula, and ELT methodology courses.

From the practitioner's point of view, it seems that EIL is difficult to grasp and explain, and is therefore perceived as a virtual language. If proficiency determinations are based on norms and standards, how does this relate to EIL? Furthermore, EIL is considered an inferior alternative, which falls short of expectations and does not follow the agreed conventions. Apparently, "we would have to invent the language we are supposed to teach" (Decke-Cornill, 2002, p. 59). This points to the need for more pedagogical guidelines for teachers' and directions regarding what aspect of the notion EIL could be incorporated into practice.

We must realize that now is the time to take a step further and explore the EIL potential in terms of ELT methodology, by including practical discussions on the topic in teacher education and training programs. At present, the main problem remains that "[m]ost teachers of English are sublimely unaware of the ELF [EIL] debate, which for the most part takes place among a very small group of researchers" (Maley, 2010, p. 38).

The findings in this study could be relevant to both ELT teachers in other contexts and applied linguists as it can raise awareness of the potential problems and challenges EIL presents to practitioners, and prompt theorists to consider these specific problems from a teaching perspective, take a more engaged stance and help design guidelines for a more effective implementation in the EFL classroom.

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