

RAISING INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS IN ENGLISH TEACHER TRAINING

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1. INTRODUCTION

In Bologna-type foreign language teaching MA programmes mostly attended by practising teachers, and in post-graduate teacher training in general, it is a grave challenge to fill the courses with content that provides the participants with information and experience that fosters their professional development. Language practice and enriching the methodological repertoire, which are the participants' two most common aims, can only be regarded sufficient if teaching is conceptualised as a **craft**, where expertise comprises the learnable tricks of the trade to be polished in practice. In contrast with this rather limiting perspective, teaching might also be viewed as a form of **art**, in which, besides learned techniques, preparation, improvisation and personal presence are equally important to create a unique experience. However, in today's "post-method era" effective teaching practice requires even more than possessing an arsenal of methods and using them improvisatively based on experience [1] [2]. Teachers can select the best methods in a given context if knowledge and experience mature into a **personal teaching-learning theory**, which enables them to practise "principled eclecticism" in decision making. In this sense, teaching is rather a **profession**, which requires regularly updating knowledge, as well as continuously evaluating and integrating experience to be able to plan and control the teaching process in the face of the ever changing circumstances. This professionalism is fostered not only by passing time and accumulating experience, but also by self-reflection [3]. Thus the key objective of teacher training should be 1) developing this ability through the reconsideration of practices, beliefs and attitudes, as well as 2) facilitating the formation of the personal teaching-learning theory, which provides guidelines for the critical integration and adaptation of new information and expertise.

In foreign language teaching (FLT) the personal teaching-learning theory includes a unique facet, as well: intercultural awareness. Teachers do not merely transmit the linguistic code to students: they also introduce new communicative roles and contexts, different schemata of thinking, and consciously or not, represent a different value system rooted in the target culture. To provide an attractive model of the effective foreign language speaker, non-native language teachers need more than the knowledge of the target language and culture: they should be aware of their own native language background, as well as the nature of intercultural communication. This awareness will enable them to move confidently between cultures, while also increasing their empathy [4], openness and tolerance towards others [5].

The aim of the study is to demonstrate how a linguistic rights course in the English Teacher MA programme of Miskolc University provided an opportunity for

developing intercultural awareness. The first part will introduce the thematic framework of the course and the participants, to be followed by a discussion of how reframing the international role of English, traditional ELT methodology and teacher roles facilitated the reconsideration of the participants' experience, beliefs and attitudes.

2. OBJECTIVES AND CONTENT OF THE „LINGUISTIC RIGHTS AND LINGUISTIC DISCRIMINATION IN ELT” COURSE

The course is scheduled for the second semester of the English Teacher MA programme of Miskolc University. Its main objective is to raise awareness of the linguistic rights issues resulting from teaching and using English as a Global Language. The topics to be discussed include the changing role of English, the evolution of English as a Lingua Franca as distinct from English as a Global Language and English as a Foreign Language, the role of native and non-native language speakers in shaping the language, the theory of Linguistic Imperialism, and the nature and justifiability of linguistic, methodological and cultural expectations transmitted by English Language Teaching (ELT). The course highlights issues of linguistic discrimination in academic life and ELT, and discusses the critical pedagogical approaches having arisen as a result.

In the following, I will share the experience of one specific course and show how the discussion topics outlined above helped the participants re-evaluate their attitude to English and ELT, as well as their own role as non-native teachers of English. Their opinions are reviewed based on their end-term essays reflecting on the major course content issues including

- how the internationalisation of English influences their beliefs about the use of English, pedagogical expectations and methods;
- if they are aware of the influence of the specific methodological principles of English language pedagogy;
- what inter/multiculturalism in the English language classroom means to them;
- and if non-native teachers should assume new roles to be able to prepare their learners for intercultural communication in English.

This course was attended by 30 participants having a varied background in different fields of primary and secondary, as well as private and state education. 22 of them were already practising teachers with 2-20 (on average 11.6) years of experience and 8 participants were trainees having transferred to the MA programme directly from their BA studies.

3. THOUGHTS ABOUT THE CHANGING ROLE OF ENGLISH

As a starting point we examined why it is worth learning English in Hungary today, and in what areas of life learners of English are the most likely to capitalise on their English language competence. All participants agreed that as the international language of communication, economy, politics and culture, “*English surrounds us everywhere*” and “*opens the door to the world*”. Representing more

specific **motivations**, language exams, degrees (15), well-paying jobs (13) and working and learning opportunities abroad (10) led the list, which were in several cases associated with the motivation of integrating into the target community:

“In English speaking countries, according to the promises, you can dream the dream, live a full life of contentment and happiness. I think the slogan works, and has a great impact on English language learners, many of whom are learning the language because they would like to continue their lives in one of the countries of their chosen language.”

Only few participants believed that personal motivations such as individual development (6), widening relationships (2) and joy learning (2) might also be significant, and it is remarkable that tourism and entertainment were not mentioned at all. According to more than one third of the participants (12), due to the increasing poverty and polarisation of society, travelling abroad is becoming an unrealistic perspective for a growing number of students, and this is what results in the dominance of work- and study-related motivations. All this, however, results either in short term motivations ending when the specific learning aim is completed, or a complete lack of language learning motivation – opinions which are also supported by related Hungarian research [6] [7].

English language use tendencies across Europe, however, show a different picture. According to the Eurobarometer 2012 survey [8], most Europeans use English for private purposes, and only a minority for work and study. The lack of internal motivation related to such personal uses might at least partially explain our low language knowledge and self-satisfaction figures. Also, approximately 80% of all English language communication now takes place between non-native speakers in international contexts. In such contexts, native-like competence targeted by education and exams appears to be less important than intercultural awareness and sensitivity [9], as well as the use of communication strategies facilitating the negotiation of meaning [10] [11]. Taking all this into account, several experts question the primacy of native norms in education [10] [12] [14], and urge the development of intercultural competence. For the language teacher, it raises two questions: 1. What kind of norms can replace native norms in education? 2. What skills and knowledge are to be understood under the label of intercultural competence?

In ELT literature, the model of the native speaker is increasingly replaced by the concept of the “fully competent” [14] or “**fully intelligible speaker**” [15]. According to Emmerson [15], these language users

- successfully approximate Received Pronunciation or General American in their pronunciation, even if they have a slight L1-based accent, use intonational units and stress, but apply assimilation, sound merger or weak forms less frequently than native speakers,
- use the 3,000 most frequent English words, common collocations and fixed phrases, plus a less frequent specialised vocabulary, but are less likely to apply colloquial phrases,
- work with a personally appropriate grammar.

Emmerson’s model also reflects the idea that non-native speakers of English do not necessarily need the full repertoire of linguistic competences, as in their own

language use contexts they apply only some specific skills. Thus, learner choice and preferences in terms of the skills, competences and language variety to be acquired should gain increasing importance if learner motivation is to be maintained.

The course participants were divided on the issue of **native English norms**. Twelve of them claimed that it was the course book they used that determined which English to teach, and it was dominantly British English. Four participants were willing to change course and teach American English on the students' demand. Only eight participants reckoned that they used and taught "*some international English*" or a "*personal version*" of English. Although more than half (16) of the participants said that they did not necessarily teach the variety of English that they themselves spoke, but one determined by the course book or the students, native English norms still determined achievement objectives both for teachers ("*the ideal teacher speaks native-like English*") and learners.

Eleven teachers argued for preparing learners for **handling linguistic variety** either to be more successful at exams ("*variety should be represented in comprehension, as this is also represented in exam listening tasks*"), or to get used to real-life speech:

"I ask my students to watch films with the original sound. The classroom listening materials never show speakers with strong accents. Learners are used to beautifully articulated English."

A respondent pointed out that encountering different varieties of English helps students shape their own version of the language. It was also a point of majority agreement that striving for handling variety instead of trying to approximate native norms at all costs naturally involves shifting the focus from linguistic perfection to fluent and intelligible negotiation of meaning. This is all the more justifiable as learners can meet many different varieties of English on the internet, thus bringing this experience into the classroom and transforming it into learning material can increase their motivation and encourage more cooperation between the teacher and the learners.

Several participants voiced their concern that in lack of regular contact with the target language countries, they found it difficult to represent any English language and culture, while others considered handling variety a grave challenge. How can intercultural awareness help in this case? **Intercultural competence** [16] [17] enables multilingual speakers to mould their L1- and foreign language-related experience into a "symbolic" or "third culture", which is an idiosyncratic knowledge system. This knowledge system consists of content- and process-related competences [18]. Content-related competencies include factual knowledge about the native and the foreign language and culture(s) (e.g., lifestyle, traditions, taboos, literary and historical facts, worldview, etc.), and process-related competences comprise the person's openness, empathy and self-awareness, as well as the ability to perceive and understand messages, attitudes, feelings conveyed through verbal and non-verbal communicative interactions. Through practising these skills, speakers realise that our behaviour is culturally determined. Thus, we can develop our own intercultural style and identity, and become intercultural communicators only through exploring and learning to appreciate each other's culture. Shaping our own intercultural style is all the more important as in multicultural contexts there is

no one unique way of communication: personal, on-the-spot solutions have to be found to cope with arising problems [19].

Intercultural competence also fosters the individual's development [4], as "s/he can select more effective strategies to establish interpersonal relationships, and becomes capable of fighting the arising stress". The importance of the issue is highlighted by the recommendations of the Modern Language Association Ad Hoc Committee On Foreign Languages, which advocated the development of translingual and transcultural competences as the key objectives of foreign language teacher training [20].

4. METHODOLOGICAL MISCONCEPTIONS ACTING AGAINST THE INTERCULTURAL APPROACH IN ELT

Although the internationalisation of English and the changing demands of global communication urge a paradigm shift in FLT, ELT pedagogy advocates several methodological principles that discourage an intercultural approach. The five most dominant principles are [21]

- the myth of **monolingualism** (English is to be taught monolingually, primarily without the use of the mother tongue (L1)),
- the myth of **subtraction** (the simultaneous study or use of other languages is detrimental to the learners' English language competence)
- the myth of the **native teacher** (the most effective language teacher is a native speaker)
- the myth of the **early start** (the earlier English language learning starts, the better final attainment can be expected)
- the myth of **maximal teaching time** (the larger the number of lessons devoted to ELT, the better the results).

During the course, we examined the first three of these myths.

4.1 The myth of monolingualism: L1 use in the English lesson

The question of L1 use divided the course participants. Twelve of them voiced the view that "*better language teachers don't speak Hungarian in the English lesson*", adding, at the same time, that they found it difficult to avoid, and often felt a twinge of conscience about it. The majority, however, believed that carefully planned L1 use "*saves time*" and "*builds a bridge between the mother tongue and the foreign language, especially at the beginning*". Despite this, only two participants highlighted the importance of translation. Also reflecting on the ideal time of starting learning foreign languages, three participants pointed out that in their opinion foreign language teaching should start only after the learners have acquired full control over their mother tongue so that the foreign language should not have a negative effect on the mother tongue, and that learners could capitalise on their native background.

While the uncertainty about the use of the mother tongue evident in this small group can be considered quite typical in my experience, an increasing number of experts advocate the advantages of bilingual language pedagogy [22] [20] [23]. It is

the structure of the mother tongue, its lexis, and the linguistic roles and communication strategies acquired through using it that lay the foundations for learning foreign languages. The similarities and differences between the two languages are important learning experiences enabling the language learner to become not only a foreign language user, but also an intercultural communicator. Achieving this objective requires the rehabilitation of translation in foreign language teaching, which has been unjustly marginalised partly due to the international English language exams not containing translation. Indeed, it offers the best opportunity for comparing the expressive power of languages and learning about other cultures [20].

4.2 The myth of subtraction: English and other foreign languages at the school and the language lesson

While all participants agreed that learning English is a must for Hungarian students, only ten of them considered it important for schools to offer the possibility to learn other foreign languages besides English. They also emphasised that every new foreign language facilitates the acquisition of further languages and contributes to the development of effective communicative competences. The circumstances, however, do not always support this aim: the narrowing choice of foreign languages resulting from the poor financial conditions of the schools seriously hinders multilingual perspectives (9). The lack of motivating course materials and learner interest in other languages also leads to the disappearance of French and German at several schools (11).

A participant reported on a sad practice she had experienced at her own school, as well: motivated by a zealous quest for exam and test success, or simply by a false perfectionism, some English teachers encourage their students to continue polishing their English instead of learning other languages – a teacher attitude which, maybe unconsciously, follows the principle of subtractivism and acts against multilingualism.

That two thirds of the respondents did not consider it important to teach other foreign languages in Hungarian public education is also reflected by their lack of interest in multilingual comparisons in ELT: only one person referred to its motivating power.

Although everyone knew the terms of inter/multicultural education, the understanding of the concepts showed some variation in the group. Eight participants defined it as developing an advanced awareness and understanding of English culture and ways of thinking. As one of them pointed out:

“The stress of learning English is not only to obtain a confident use of the language in everyday situations but to acquire a broad sense of how native speakers think and also what is their cultural and historical heritage.”

Teachers apply a wide arsenal of motivating techniques to achieve this aim: decorate their classrooms with realia, posters visualising English language and culture-related content; create a “mini-England”, where entry is allowed only in

possession of a passport and English is the only acceptable way of communication; and organise competitions, trips and theatre visits.

Ten participants relied on the course book content when it came to intercultural orientation: while insisting on British English norms, they found content introducing other English speaking cultures motivating. However, two of them noted that native or non-native speakers with heavier accents featuring the listening materials “*are difficult to understand*” or “*show a bad example for the students*”.

In both cases the intercultural approach foregrounds complying with the target language norms, from which the idea of international communication is largely missing. A participant’s account of an international student exchange programme she participated in clearly illustrates the point. While communicating with the visitors from another country was extremely motivating for the students, and they understood each other perfectly through English, in their teacher’s opinion, the “*horrible English*” her otherwise very competent students spoke with the foreigners did not at all forward their linguistic development.

In contrast with this, twelve participants argued for the importance of preparing students for the new challenges of international communication in English. Although introducing variety might be difficult due to the lack of experience and appropriate course materials, involving the learners’ experience, interest and materials selected by them not only provides an excellent opportunity for a cooperative exploration of variety, but also improves teacher-learner relationships. The participants offered examples of cross-cultural explorations through a closer cooperation with native lecturers. Discussing their experiences in Hungary raised students’ awareness of their native cultural background, and created a forum for sharing their own related experiences abroad. Finally, some participants looked at language teaching as an opportunity to advocate linguistic and cultural equality:

“We should never forget to remind our students that no culture or language is more valuable than the other. One great opportunity to do so in our school is through accepting members of AIESEC on the internship programme as teacher assistants. They are usually not from English-speaking countries. We have had volunteers from Brazil, Italy and Greece.”

This approach largely contributes to the development of learners’ openness and tolerance towards other languages and cultures.

4.3 Language – thought – culture: Explorations in the English lesson

As the concept of multilingualism and multiculturalism in the English lesson proved difficult to grasp, we looked for specific language examples that might provide opportunities for intercultural sensitisation. In international contexts the success of communication often depends on the language users’ awareness of and willingness to accommodate to the varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds and the resulting differences in ways of thinking, communicative expectations and linguistic roles.

Exploring how different cultural experiences result in different linguistic expressions can make thought provoking language course content. Working on a

project introducing Hungarian culture and lifestyle, learners will inevitably find culturally embedded expressions resisting direct translation to English (e.g., *szalonnasütés*, *pogácsa*, *vőfély*). However, there are also phrases presenting a translational difficulty despite the fact that the phenomenon denoted by them exists in the target culture. For instance, conveying the idea of a *másfél szobás lakás* as a *two-room flat* in English results in the loss of the negative implication, the dissatisfaction of the Hungarian families who moved from the country to towns in the hope of a better life, but were never able to leave the small flat in the huge concrete block behind. The cultural experience of making one's way in life is also reflected by the phrases different languages offer for earning money. Those who *make* (American English) and *earn* money (British English; *verdienen*, German), or perhaps work for it (*зарабатывать*, Russian) have a completely different attitude to it than those who win it (*gagner*, French; *câștiga*, Romanian) or are continuously searching it (*keres*, Hungarian).

Tales, legends, sayings and proverbs transmit the ancestors' experience and wisdom in a symbolic form, too. The ritualistic closing sentence of English and Hungarian tales reveals a basic difference in the life philosophy of the two cultures. While we, Hungarians "*boldogan élünk, amíg meg nem halunk*" ("live happily till we die"), thinking of the unavoidable end even in our happiest moments, the English "*live happily ever after*", which suggests a more open and optimistic perspective. Sayings and proverbs also include references to culturally preferred forms of linguistic behaviour – for instance, relating to small talk. Hungarians are eager to share their happiness and problems with others ("*jó, ha van kivel megosztani örömünket, bánatunkat*"), just as the English ("*joy shared, joy doubled: sorrow shared, sorrow halved*") or the French ("*chagrin partagé, chagrin diminué; plaisir partagé, plaisir double*"). The Finns, in contrast, are more reserved and careful regarding opening up to others ("*ei kaikkea saa muille sanoa, että itsekin jotakin tietää*", meaning that "you can't tell everything to others so you also know something"). In contrast with the Hungarians, English and French, they also avoid small talk not to reveal anything personal inadvertently. If, however, we cannot contribute anything meaningful to the discussion, remaining silent is considered wise in all these cultures: "*hallgatni arany*" (Hungarian), "*silence is golden*" (English), "*la parole est d'argent, mais le silence est d'or*" (French), "*puhumatta paras*" (Finnish).

The communicative expectations conveyed by sayings and proverbs are rooted in an implicate value system. English indirectness in communication, for instance, is motivated by the ideology of individualism [24]. When English speakers ask somebody to do something in the form of a question ("*Would you like to have some more beer?*" "*Could you open your books?*"), they convey the idea that they respect the other person's integrity and right to make individual decisions, which they do not want to interfere with. Because of this, English is often regarded a particularly polite language. The direct imperatives that the Poles ("*Proszę bardzo! Jeszcze troszkę! Koniecznie!*" meaning "Please! A little more! You must!") or Hungarians ("*Vegyen még!*" "*Nyissátok ki a könyveteket!*" meaning "Have some more!" "Open your books!") would use in similar contexts could appear to be rude and impolite, whereas they are not meant to be: in these collectivistic cultures it is the host's and

the teacher's responsibility to take care of the well-being of the guests and the students, and to be able to do so s/he is entitled to assume full control of the situation.

The same question can be examined from another viewpoint, as well. According to linguistic relativism, L1 influences thinking and worldview as languages provide different labels to dissect and name aspects of reality [25]. The day, for instance, consists of 24 hours all over the world, but greetings create varied frameworks in different languages to section the public part of it when human encounters characteristically happen, as shown by Figure 1.

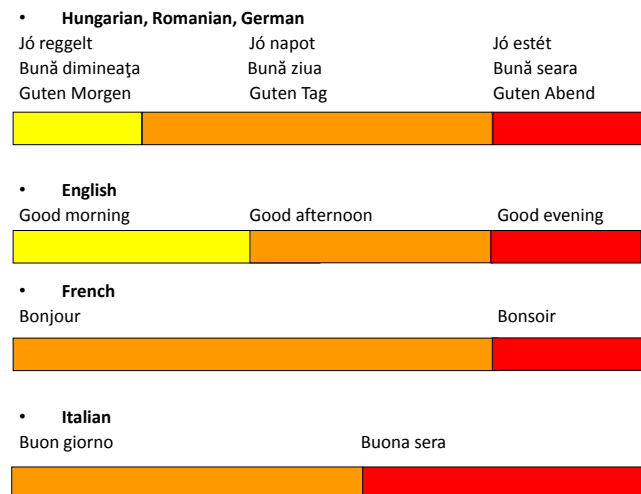


Figure 1. Greeting forms

While the Hungarian, Romanian and German greetings divide the public part of the day into three parts with a shorter morning (till 10) and evening (after 6), for the English the morning and the afternoon are two equally long periods followed by a short evening after 6. French and Italian greeting forms distinguish only two parts of the day: in French the evening greeting form replaces *Bonjour* after about 6, while in Italian *Buona sera* is used after 3. An overview of greeting forms provides a good opportunity even for starters to discover the different rhythm of life reinforced by linguistic forms.

Social address forms reflect a similar aspect of linguistic relativism. English is quite unique among European languages in the sense that the second person singular and plural pronoun *you* is used to address conversational partners in all registers. As verbal inflection does not indicate the level of formality either, it can only be expressed by adding a name or a title:

<i>John</i>		(informal/formal – democratic)
<i>Aunt Polly</i>	<i>could you please sign it?</i>	(informal – hierarchical)
<i>Mr. Jones</i>		(formal – hierarchical)

In Russian, French and German, two address registers are distinguished grammatically: informal and formal. The formal address form in the first two cases is expressed by the second person plural pronoun and corresponding verbal

inflection, while in German the third person plural pronoun is used (without distinguishing plural and singular reference). Hungarian represents a different pattern by grammatically distinguishing three registers:

Te is a buszra vársz? (Are you also waiting for the bus?)

(informal– democratic: second person singular/plural pronouns *te/ti* +verbal inflection)

A buszra tetszik várni? (Are you also waiting for the bus?)

(informal–hierarchical: third person singular/plural modal auxiliary *tetszik*+ infinitive)

Őn is a buszra vár? (Are you also waiting for the bus?)

(formal–democratic/hierarchical: second person singular/plural pronouns *ön/önök*+ verbal inflection)

Language learners might engage in cultural exploration by examining what is implied by these address forms. Does English *you* really democratise relationships, or, on the contrary, does it keep everyone at an arm's length (cf. [24])? What difference does it make if a language offers the second or the third person singular/plural for formal address forms? While the second person refers to someone present and accessible, the third person is a way of distancing, indicating someone who is absent, not accessible. Taking this idea further, learners will recognise that distancing address forms tend to be coupled with a general tendency for a bigger power distance at a cultural level, for instance in Germany. IKEA, whose public image includes communicating with the customers in an informal-democratic style, was not allowed to follow the same practice in Germany as it was judged to be inappropriate. While the same distancing is characteristic of Hungarian formal address forms, the informal-hierarchical register offers an alternative for distinguishing respectful relationships: the modal auxiliary *tetszik* reflects the speaker's intention to respect the partner's opinion and choice. Culturally-rooted linguistic representations foreground different aspects of human relations: in English, the equal status of communicating partners, and in Hungarian the clear definition of hierarchical status as well as the respect towards the elders or those at higher levels of the social hierarchy.

4.4. Intercultural pedagogical awareness

Being able to reflect on linguistic and cultural differences and similarities requires a high level of intercultural awareness and sensitivity, so at this point it seems relevant to reconsider the question of the ideal language teacher. The uneasiness that the course participants expressed concerning representing the English language and culture rings together with international survey results. They confirm that non-native language teachers tend to find it frustrating that while they do not have native-like linguistic and cultural competence in English, they have to represent target language norms towards their students because of school requirements and exams [26]. In this English as a Foreign Language teaching paradigm, the aims of which include working for native-like competence, being able to communicate with native speakers and integrating into the target culture, non-native teachers are definitely at a disadvantage. If, however, the focus is shifted

towards preparing learners for international communication in English, there are three areas where they might rely on their special assets.

Owing to their **own experience as foreign language learners and users**, they can foresee learners' problems and thus handle them more effectively. They possess a wide repertoire of communication strategies developed in international contexts, which might serve as a model for their learners.

Acting as conscious users of their mother tongues [22] and having an optimal command of the target language, they are capable of **cross-cultural mediation**. As they can highlight the pragmatic and sociocultural differences between the languages, as well as the different cultural experience and values behind them, non-native teachers can also raise their learners' interest in other cultures and develop their openness and tolerance towards others.

Through their pedagogical training, they acquire a critical awareness of the culturally rooted **intellectual traditions** and related teaching methods that are conveyed by the foreign language they teach. These value systems determine the culturally different concepts of useful knowledge and effective teaching, and thus the aims and methods of education; because of this they might cause conflicts at the language lesson, which is at the intersection of two cultures. Three such intellectual traditions can be distinguished [27]. **Classical humanism** stresses the "transmission of an esteemed cultural heritage" in education and sees the main aim of research as contributing to this body of knowledge. **Reconstructivism** considers education a means of restructuring society, an instrument of social change, and lays great emphasis on "planning, efficiency and rationality". Finally, **Progressivism** is based on the idea that education should serve "the growth and self-realisation of the individual", and foregrounds problem-solving, reflection and action. The primary educational aim is to "stimulate new ideas, opinion and perceptions rather than simply exchange them". The degree of desired creativity and reflection in any educational system depends on these value systems and varies across cultures. For instance, while the Hungarian educational system is dominated by the tradition of Classical Humanism, the British system is influenced by Reconstructivism and the North American by Progressivism. Non-native teachers who are aware of these differences will understand why Hungarian learners of English are challenged by developing a personal voice and presenting a clear argument in essay writing, peer-reviewing [28], project work, or avoiding plagiarism [29]. They will also recognise that learners need special training to be able to comply with these expectations - if they are judged appropriate in their own context. Such intercultural pedagogical awareness enables non-native teachers to compare and harmonise their own school culture with the expectations conveyed by foreign language course materials and exam requirements, as well as their learners' needs.

5. CONCLUSION

The globalisation of English has created new contexts of international communication, which demand language competences different from those governing today's ELT. Beyond the ability to handle linguistic variety, speakers need intercultural skills enabling them to negotiate messages effectively.

Developing such skills presents a great challenge to non-native English language teachers as it means changing their traditional roles as well. Many consider these changes a form of prestige loss: as learners can freely access different Englishes on the internet, and try themselves in real communicative situations, teachers are not the only source of knowledge or measure/judge of competence any more. If, however, they abandon the idealistic aim of achieving native-like English language competence, and adopt the perspective of English as a Lingua Franca instead, non-native teachers are offered a new role: that of the intercultural mediator. Seen from this viewpoint, their multilingualism represents a special asset as it enables them to compare and contrast languages and cultures, as well as connect the foreign language with local experience, thus developing the learners' cultural sensitivity, openness and tolerance. On the other hand, non-native teachers are language learners themselves, engaged in life-long learning and empowered by experience that makes them more sensitive to learners' problems. Engaging in a cooperative adventure to explore the language together with the learners liberates teachers from the obligation to determine the learning content and criteria of assessment on their own. Turning the materials and experience provided by the learners into course material provides an effective solution for representing linguistic variety and allow teachers to assume the more comfortable role of helpers and facilitators, at the same time increasing learners' involvement and autonomy.

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