
ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA: A TOOL FOR INCLUSION OR EXCLUSION?

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Abstract

This paper explores the notion of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) from two opposite perspectives: ELF as a powerful unifying force and ELF as a potential threat to linguistic diversity. The first part explores how ELF is bringing the world together in fields such as education, business, and tourism. On the other hand, the second part examines the concepts of linguistic imperialism and language shift using the US context as one example to illustrate potential threats to language diversity. The last section reconsiders the perception of ELF as a threat by redefining it and featuring common cases of language maintenance. Finally, learners of English as a second or foreign language should be introduced to concepts such as ELF to enhance their classroom experience and develop realistic expectations.

Keywords: English as Lingua Franca (ELF), Native English speaker (NES), Non-native English Speaker (NNES), English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL)

1. Introduction

“These days if you don’t know English, you are blind” (Lee, 2016, p. 334). This striking statement by a senior Korean citizen perfectly describes the state that the English language has reached on a global scale today. With its vivid metaphor, it encapsulates the widespread perception of English as indispensable for participation in contemporary social, academic, and economic life and foregrounds the central issue explored in this paper: The global reach of English as a lingua franca (ELF) and the implications that this perceived necessity holds in different domains of social life.

English has dominated the world, and earned the title of lingua franca, as Latin had once been. The rise of ELF is mostly due to geopolitical reasons, stemming from economic power. English is the language of business, science, and technology, among other fields (e.g., Seidlhofer, 2011; Sifakis, 2014). It serves as the primary language at international summits, facilitating communication across nationalities and cultures. Sometimes, it may also force some communities to repress their own language in service of

speaking English. This paper explores the dual nature of English in the global context, focusing on the tension between its practical utility and the potential cultural cost of its global dominance.

The term *lingua franca* originated from the Arabic *lisan al farang*, which referred to an intermediary language used by Arabic speakers to communicate with Western European foreigners (House, 2003). In general terms, communication in English between individuals from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds is defined as ELF (Cogo, 2015; Ishikawa, & Jenkins, 2019; Mauranen, 2022; Mendes de Oliveira, 2023; Seidlhofer, 2011). The implication that English is now predominantly spoken by bilinguals and multilinguals, also called non-native English speakers (NNES), means that it “is now a plurilithic language with diverse and complex pronunciations, grammars, vocabulary, discourse and pragmatic conventions, and cultural conceptualizations” (Marlina & Xu, 2018, p. 1). Thus, we can safely say that users of ELF do not belong to a distinct community (Mauranen, 2018), nor is there a clear threshold level of English proficiency required for participation in ELF interactions (Canagarajah, 2007). As a result, a typical ELF setting is characterized by negotiation of meaning and a minimal focus on accuracy, prioritizing effective communication (Marlina & Xu, 2018).

The power that ELF holds is twofold, reflecting a rather complex picture related to global linguistic interaction. While it fosters cross-cultural communication and mutual understanding, its widespread influence also raises concerns about linguistic homogenization. This topic is addressed based on the following research questions:

- (1) How does the global spread of ELF foster inclusion, communication, and mobility across education, society, and the economy?
- (2) How does ELF endanger multilingualism, minority-language maintenance, and cultural diversity, and in what ways are these effects visible in daily life, education, or migration?
- (3) How can ESL/EFL teaching address ELF's benefits and challenges while promoting plurilingualism and intercultural competence?

The methodology of this paper consists of a brief review of relevant literature, which provides a foundation for discussing key perspectives and findings on ELF in education and socioeconomic contexts. The first part of this paper looks at how English can be a positive force bringing the world together, while the second part explores its potential threat to language diversity. The discussion and conclusion synthesize these perspectives, highlighting implications for language policy and suggesting directions for future research.

2. ELF as a unifying force across cultures and contexts

In this section, ELF will be explored through a positive unifying lens, highlighting its role in fostering global cohesion across various fields, including education and socioeconomics.

2.1. ELF in education: Communication and global mobility

As previously mentioned, one of the most prominent features of ELF is its emphasis on negotiation of meaning, while strict accuracy in grammar and pronunciation is often considered less critical (Kaypak & Ortaçtepe, 2014; Ke & Cahyani, 2014; Marlina & Xu, 2018; Nogami, 2020). This highlights a key characteristic of ELF: English is no longer the exclusive property of native English speaker (ENS) communities but functions as a contact language in multicultural and multilingual contexts. Furthermore, ELF users typically do not prioritize attaining native-speaker-like pragmatic competence (House, 2003), focusing instead on effective communication. These insights have clear relevance for education at all levels, as ELF can facilitate participation, inclusion, and communication in increasingly diverse classrooms (see e.g., Giannakou & Karalia, 2023). The current section, however, will focus specifically on higher education, where ELF plays a crucial role in enabling global interaction and mobility among students and teachers in academic settings.

In a study by Ke and Cahyani (2014) on ELF in online written communication, 58 Taiwanese university students were asked to exchange written messages in many forms (emails, forum discussions, and live chat) with Indonesian students. The findings showed that only five students considered that correct grammar is equivalent to intelligible communication, while the majority became aware that their NNES pen pals' English is influenced by their mother tongue, and therefore not perfect in terms of NES standards (Ke & Cahyani, 2014). As a result of the widespread use of ELF, there is also more awareness regarding the different varieties of English called World Englishes (e.g., Indian English, Nigerian English, Chinese English), which stem from the diverse cultures where NNES use English. For instance, in a study on 104 Turkish students from a university English Department, more than half of them "agreed on the idea that in the future there might be a variety of English in Turkey" (Tosuncuoğlu & Kırmızı, 2019, p. 168).

A common student experience that raises their awareness on the different aspects of ELF is the study abroad experience such as Erasmus. Kaypak and Ortaçtepe (2014) surveyed 53 Turkish Erasmus students to find out how their five-month stay abroad shaped their beliefs about ELF. The participants generally perceived ELF in a positive or neutral light, since it facilitates communication in different ELF contexts. Results also showed that students began to believe that having good mastery of English is independent of cultural knowledge of English-speaking countries such as the UK, the US, and Australia. This clearly indicates that English is no longer owned by its "native speakers".

Furthermore, Llanes et al.'s (2016) study on 39 Catalan/Spanish Erasmus students who went to a non-English speaking country demonstrated significant improvement in general English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) proficiency and written lexical complexity. This may be due to using ELF in both formal and

informal contexts. The former refers to the use of English in performing academic tasks, and the latter is the socializing aspect of the study abroad experience. Since these universities usually host students from many countries at a time, there is also further opportunity for developing intercultural communication in English. Thus, in academic settings, ELF is usually seen in a positive light as a tool for effective communication and collaboration between educational institutions around the globe.

More recently, Giannakou and Zampiaki (2025) examined the role of ELF in the teaching and learning of Greek as a second/foreign language (L2) among Erasmus+ students and teachers in a Greek university. Drawing on questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations, they explored attitudes toward ELF and its pedagogical implications. Their findings show that both groups (language learners and teachers) view ELF positively, especially in the early stages of L2 instruction, valuing it as a means of fostering inclusivity, facilitating communication, and supporting learning in multilingual classrooms. The authors highlight the benefits of translanguaging and argue that mindful use of learners' full linguistic repertoires, including ELF, can promote plurilingualism.

Moreover, in the higher education context, Phillipson (2008), in categorizing different purposes of ELF, referred to academic English as *lingua academica*, underscoring its significance as the dominant language for academic discourse, research collaboration, and knowledge production worldwide (cf. Section 3.2). This highlights the role of English not merely as a communication tool, but as a medium through which academic knowledge is constructed, disseminated, and evaluated across international contexts. Its status as *lingua academica* also facilitates mobility among scholars, access to global research networks, and participation in international conferences and publications, making ELF a central element in shaping academic careers and fostering intercultural scholarly exchange.

2.2. ELF in global socioeconomic interactions

English is closely tied to globalization and has proven to be a useful tool for the development of social and economic interactions worldwide. Lee (2016) interviewed 15 working-class senior citizens from a public senior citizen center in Seoul, South Korea. These participants expressed frustration toward not knowing any English. Despite these language barriers, they viewed globalization as a pathway for Korea to become an "advanced nation" (p. 342) and showed interest in taking formal English classes to better integrate into their changing society.

In the world of business, English serves as a critical tool for international communication. Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF) is widely used in overseas business, while a mix of English and the home language is employed domestically. Takino (2020) studied 34 Japanese businesspeople with 20 to 30 years of experience and found that the English used in business settings is not standard monolingual English but a version where

they “draw upon their linguistic repertoires to facilitate and accommodate ‘BELF communication’” (p. 248). Switching between English and the home language ensures better understandability and inclusion, even in non-English-speaking business fields. This adaptability is crucial as the majority of business-related degrees worldwide are taught in English, which later transfers into the workplace. Moreover, a growing number of companies worldwide are interested in doing business overseas, where they rarely share one mother tongue; therefore, BELF is essential.

A major business field where English has become indispensable is tourism. With the rise of global travel, language is seldom a hindrance since there is an expectation among tourists that English will be used and understood in any tourist destination worldwide (Lee & Lee, 2023). This linguistic ubiquity has transformed the global tourism landscape, creating a standardized communication framework that enables travelers to navigate diverse cultural contexts with increasing ease and confidence, while simultaneously reshaping local hospitality industries (Fox, 2008; Lee & Lee, 2023).

The significance of English in business is further emphasized by its role in facilitating international trade and investment. According to a study by Björkman (2016), English has become the primary medium for communication in multinational corporations, enabling seamless interaction across different linguistic backgrounds. This trend underscores the necessity for proficiency in English to participate effectively in the global economy.

Additionally, the widespread use of English in business contexts has led to the development of specific linguistic competencies. Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen (2013) highlight the importance of BELF competence, which encompasses not only language skills but also intercultural communication abilities, to navigate the complexities of international business interactions successfully. This competence enables professionals to adapt their communication strategies to diverse cultural norms and expectations, facilitating effective collaboration across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Moreover, the dynamic nature of global business environments necessitates a flexible approach to communication, where understanding and negotiating cultural differences become as crucial as linguistic proficiency. In this context, BELF competence is not merely about linguistic accuracy but about achieving communicative goals through mutual understanding and respect for cultural diversity.

In conclusion, embracing ELF as a positive force requires an open-minded perspective that values all varieties of English equally, without perceiving any as deficient (Marlina & Xu, 2018). As discussed earlier, ELF serves as a unifying force among NNEs and between NES and NNEs. Moving forward, this analysis explores the extent to which the global dominance of English poses a threat to multilingualism and cultural diversity, and how such a threat may manifest in linguistic and cultural practices.

3. ELF – A threat to linguistic diversity?

ELF has been viewed by many as a threat to linguistic diversity, while others argue that it is far from being a threat. Below is a discussion of both points of view, exploring the concept of linguistic imperialism, highlighting the US linguistic context as a representative example, and, on the other side, some important evidence of heritage language maintenance.

3.1. The impact of ELF in linguistic diversity

3.1.1. *Linguistic imperialism*

Linguistic imperialism is a complex theoretical concept developed by Phillipson (1992, 1997), which explains how language ideologies (i.e., personal beliefs about language and identity) are used to justify and maintain the dominance of certain languages over others through structural and cultural inequalities. These language ideologies are often closely tied to political factors (e.g., dominant languages in post-colonial countries' education system), economic factors (i.e., a global North/global South country relations), and societal factors (e.g., gender and racial issues). For example, an assumption such as “only European languages are suited to the task of developing African economies and minds” (Phillipson, 1997, p. 240) is a result of a linguistic imperialism mindset. The negative implications of linguistic imperialism are rarely seen as problematic to native speakers of “dominant” languages such as English or French (Phillipson, 1997).

As for the global dominance of the English language, Phillipson (2007) traced it back to the power and influence of the US politics. During George W. Bush's presidential campaign in 2000, the perceived right for the US to “dominate the world” was explicitly stated, and later on spread to the world by way of foreign policy. One of the ways to achieve this was through language policy and a desire to spread the American standards and values worldwide. Let us take a look at some examples illustrating the presence of linguistic imperialism in day-to-day life.

On a practical level, some signs of English linguistic imperialism include NNEs feeling nervous or uncomfortable when talking to NES, either because they feel inadequate and intimidated by their “standard” English communication, or because of their own perceived lack of English proficiency (Kaypak & Ortactepe, 2014; Lee & Lee, 2023; Nogami, 2020). This is due to the false assumption that English belongs to its “native speakers”, who often fail to realize they might be acting inconsiderate toward ELF users.

A study by Lee (2016) on 15 South Korean senior citizens also revealed signs of linguistic imperialism. Since English has flooded Korean audio-visual and printed media, the participants could not help but feel “a sense of falling behind” (p. 329), comparing their situation to “a disability”, feeling “like an idiot”, “blind”, and “illiterate” (p. 330), which heavily impacts their mental wellbeing on a day-to-day basis. Moreover, they reported that they feel disempowered and almost disrespected when spending time with their grandchildren who use a lot of English in daily communica-

tion. Sometimes, they pretend to understand it to avoid feelings of embarrassment and shame in front of the young generation.

In an ESL/EFL setting, linguistic imperialism can manifest in situations where learners, administrators, or parents prefer NES teachers over NNES teachers. In Tosuncuoglu and Kirmizi's (2019) survey of 44 English instructors and 104 university students from an English Language Department, 75% of participants preferred NES to NNES teachers. This is an alarming rate for two reasons. First, more than half of these students believed there would be a variety of Turkish English in the future, which indicated their openness to the idea of ELF and World Englishes. However, when it came to classroom practice, the majority adhered to a linguistic imperialism mindset, presumably trusting NES teachers' skills and professionalism over NNES teachers. Second, these were participants from a university English language department; thus, having a native speakerism mindset as future English teachers might continue the spread of this potentially harmful ideology in classroom practice.

In addition to preferring NES teachers, another sign of native speakerism (stemming from linguistic imperialism) is the link between English fluency and social class: "speakers with great English fluency [are] more intelligent, educated, smart, knowledgeable, and professional" (Lee & Lee, 2023, p. 63). This mindset is even found in Ke and Cahyani's (2014) study where most students agreed that grammar accuracy is less important in ELF contexts. However, some of them valued accurate pronunciation and wanted to sound like a NES. Some others were able to deconstruct this belief as a result of the study and became aware that it "might be a kind of worshipping foreign things" (Ke & Cahyani, 2014, p. 35), denoting a negative view of linguistic imperialism. It is worth mentioning here that learners' beliefs about language learning are dynamic and can change through noticing and self-reflection.

Thus, linguistic imperialism can be observed in many areas of daily life and classroom environments around the world, yet recognizing its potential harm requires open-mindedness and awareness. The next section takes a close look at the case of the US language policy and its consequences on the immigrant population as an illustrative example of how language dominance can affect multilingual communities.

3.1.2. Language shift and the example of the US context

In immigration contexts, language shift refers to the assimilation process of immigrants from their own (minority) language to the (majority) language of the host country. Montrul (2015) clarifies that the majority/minority distinction is purely socio-political, rather than inherent to the language itself. For instance, "global languages such as Spanish, English, Dutch, Portuguese, Hindi, Chinese, and so on are majority languages in their own territories but minority languages in diaspora contexts" (Montrul, 2015, p. 14). Language shift usually takes place by the third generation of immigrants in any country where there is migration, such as the

US and Australia. It tends to start at home by the second generation, especially if the kids were younger than five years old when they immigrated. In this case, they start using the majority language at home because of being extensively exposed to it in school (Garcia, 2009; Montrul, 2013).

It is worth mentioning a particular example of language shift that is not due to immigration but has happened in the home country itself, as a result of post-colonial education systems. In his article on linguistic imperialism, Phillipson (1996) observed that certain families in India were not literate in their mother tongue because of being educated in English-medium schools over two generations. This happened even when their mother tongue was the dominant state language. Thus, language shift can happen in any context where two (or more) languages are “competing”, and it is naturally the “strongest” (politically and economically) one that dominates regardless of it being an official state language or not.

The US context has drawn the attention of linguists for its restrictive policy toward language diversity, despite it being one of the most multicultural countries. For instance, the states of California, Arizona, and Massachusetts passed legislation for English-only instruction in 1998, 2000, and 2002 respectively, therefore minimizing the importance of bilingualism and bilingual education (Cohen & Wickens, 2015; Garcia, 2009). This puts immigrant children in these states in a position to enter transitional bilingual education programs, which ultimately aim for full monolingual English education. Cohen and Wickens (2015) looked at the case of three adolescent Mexican immigrants in the US who confirmed “that their ability to communicate in English had surpassed their ability to communicate in Spanish” (p. 10), despite Spanish still being spoken at home since their parents were not able to effectively communicate in English. Language shift ultimately leads to subtractive bilingualism, which is the learning of a second language at the expense of the first one. This process happens with “children developing a feeling that the home language is useless at school, and that only the school language is valued and assessed” (Garcia, 2009, p. 250). It also comes at the cost of losing the culture because of immigrating at a young age, as well as losing clear communication with parents and family members at home who only speak Spanish (Cohen & Wickens, 2015). This is in congruence with Baker and Wright’s (2021) claim that “the destruction of minority languages is the destruction of intimacy, family and community, often involving oppression of the weak by the strong” (p. 93). Moreover, the phenomenon of immigrating to a “powerful” nation, which can often be an English-speaking one, is a sufficient explanation of the shift to its majority language.

The US imposing English explicitly (through legislation) or implicitly (through promoting only one language) might sound to be expected: a nation wanting to protect its linguistic identity by preserving its only “official” language. However, English is not (yet) the official language of the US.¹ As Finegan (2014, p. 3)

1. In March 2025, President Donald Trump signed an executive order to make English the official language of the US, marking an unprecedented decision in the country’s 250 years of existence (Davies, 2025). It is still early to predict the political and socio-cultural impact of this decision.

asserts, “in fact, the United States does not have an official language – and has never had one”. This further proves the point about linguistic imperialism (see Section 3.1.1.): the power of the English language has reached this far because of the influence of American political and economic ideologies. For instance, the legislations against bilingual education mentioned above stem from such ideologies rather than empirical research evidence that proves the numerous and specific benefits of bilingualism and bilingual education (Cohen & Wickens, 2015).

To conclude, language shift is a common experience for immigrants in all contexts, and language shift to English in particular can be seen as a threat to one’s native language for practical reasons denoting political influence and economic power. The next section explores the opposing view by discussing ways in which minority language speakers strive to maintain their language.

3.2. ELF – Far from a threat to linguistic diversity?

House (2003) argues against the claim that ELF is a threat to language diversity. She reaffirms that ELF, by definition, is but an instrumental language used for communication among speakers who do not share a mother tongue. Therefore, ELF is not a language for identification: NNES usually identify with their own language and culture.

Furthermore, House (2003) and Montrul (2013), among others, mention the phenomenon of minority language speakers’ desire to acquire, reacquire, or develop their mother tongue skills by means of formal classroom instruction. This desire stems from a sentiment of wanting to reconnect with their identity, culture, and traditions. This was also reinforced in Cohen and Wicken’s (2015) study on three adolescent Mexican immigrants in the US, who enrolled in a “Spanish for Heritage Speakers” class in high school, as well as made personal efforts at home to maintain and improve their Spanish skills. Such classes may look like second language instruction to those speakers who switched to the majority language at a young age. They might have switched to English-only instruction before developing solid literacy skills in the mother tongue.

As previously mentioned, the US as a nation does not have an official language, but some states do: “Spanish in New Mexico and Hawaiian and English in Hawaii” (Finegan, 2014, p. 2). A minority language having an official status can provide a sense of “safety” to its speakers who share this point of view, even if the reality might look different (Phillipson, 1996).

On a global scale, there has been a considerable number of laws and agreements signed to protect the rights of minority language speakers, notably the right to be educated in the mother tongue. Examples include the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992), the Delhi Declaration and Framework for Action at UNESCO’s Education for All Summit (1993), and the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights by UNESCO and other nongovernmental organizations (1996) (Garcia, 2009). In the Af-

rican context, Phillipson (1996) reports on the issue with putting such agreements to action: linguistic matters are often not perceived as urgent compared to other more “essential” political or economic decisions. We need a change in mindset and intentionality in order to reach the goals of these agreements in practice. As a result, the natural flow is that imperialistic languages dominate in practice, despite them not always having an official status. According to Garcia (2009), a common phenomenon around the world is for language-minority children to attend maintenance bilingual education programs as opposed to transitional bilingual education (see Section 3.1.2). Maintenance bilingual education programs aim at developing the child’s home language by using it as a medium of instruction alongside the majority language. However, this is an individual choice made by the parents who want their children to be fully literate in the home language as well.

Similarly, at the academic level, there have been initiatives such as the “Declaration of Multilingualism in Higher Education” by the European Civil Society Platform for Multilingualism (ECSPM). The online petition advocates for the use of languages other than English as the medium of instruction in university courses, the freedom for students to choose a language for research papers and projects, as well as regular use of translation tools and other technological resources in order to promote multilingualism in academia (ECSPM Multilingualism, 2023). From this perspective, the widespread use of English in academia can marginalize other languages, reinforcing linguistic hierarchies and limiting the visibility of knowledge produced in diverse linguistic contexts. Thus, English as *lingua academica* (Phillipson, 2008), although prevailing in research and scholarly exchange, is also critiqued due to the inequalities that it creates.

It is therefore observed that efforts to preserve minority languages and to promote linguistic diversity beyond English are often undertaken at the individual and community levels rather than through macro-level policy decisions (e.g., legislation and agreements). Ensuring the survival and vitality of diverse languages requires supportive policies that recognize multilingualism as a valuable resource.

4. ESL/EFL classroom implications

Introducing ESL/EFL learners worldwide to the concept of ELF, having discussions on the varieties of English, and designing tasks around multicultural settings may help them have a more flexible linguistic perspective and a sort of relief that they are not necessarily expected to perform at a NES, monolingual level. In fact, bilinguals should not be expected to function as two monolinguals in one individual, as their linguistic abilities are inherently dynamic and integrated rather than compartmentalized (Baker, 2021; Grosjean, 2010). Any language classroom, particularly ESL/EFL classrooms, should acknowledge the learner as a whole individual, embracing the cultural and linguistic backgrounds that they bring. It is essential that the classroom environment does

not attempt to reshape students by pressuring them to suppress or alter their authentic identities in order to conform to the learning setting. Instead, L2 learners should be actively encouraged in the classroom through explicit motivation, with a focus on raising awareness on the cognitive, social, and cultural benefits of being bilingual or multilingual. This cannot be achieved without effective teacher education on ELF and World Englishes (Macías & Mosquera-Pérez, 2024; Sifakis, 2014), as well as continuing professional development, particularly on heritage language maintenance and formal bilingual education, such as the state-funded heritage language programs in Sweden (Bohnacker et al., 2025) and Chinese community schools in the UK (Yiakoumetti, 2022).

5. Discussion

This paper has explored the dual nature of ELF in contemporary global contexts, examining both its unifying potential and its possible threats to linguistic diversity. The review of literature highlights that ELF is a dynamic and pragmatic tool, enabling effective communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries, particularly in higher education, business, and tourism contexts (Lee, 2016; Phillipson, 2008; Seidlhofer, 2011).

In higher education, ELF serves as a medium for academic discourse, research collaboration, and international mobility (Giannakou & Zampiaki, 2025; Phillipson, 2008). Studies on Erasmus students show that ELF fosters inclusivity and enhances the use of learners' full linguistic repertoires, promoting plurilingual competence and cross-cultural understanding (Giannakou & Zampiaki, 2025; Kaypak & Ortaçtepe, 2014; Llanes et al., 2016; Zampiaki & Giannakou, 2025). These findings support the argument that ELF, when understood as a flexible and negotiated means of communication, can empower learners and facilitate participation in multilingual academic environments.

In socioeconomic contexts, the role of ELF in business and tourism illustrates its practical value. Business ELF (BELF) enables professionals to communicate effectively across different linguistic backgrounds, drawing on both English and local languages to achieve mutual understanding (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013; Takino, 2020). Tourism similarly benefits from the widespread expectation of English as a global lingua franca, which creates standardized frameworks for interaction while supporting local economies (Fox, 2008; Lee & Lee, 2023). In both cases, ELF competence crucially includes intercultural skills, emphasizing flexibility, adaptability, and negotiation in communication.

However, the dominance of English also poses potential threats to minority languages and cultural diversity. Linguistic imperialism, native-speakerism, and language shift are key mechanisms through which English exerts influence, often subtly, in both formal education and everyday life (Phillipson, 1992, 1997; Lee, 2016; Tosuncuoğlu & Kırmızı, 2019; Cohen & Wickens, 2015). In the US context, policies favouring English-only instruction demonstrate how majority-language dominance can lead

to subtractive bilingualism and cultural loss among immigrant communities (Baker & Wright, 2021; Garcia, 2009). Yet, initiatives promoting heritage language maintenance, bilingual education, and multilingual practices in (higher) education show that these threats can be mitigated (Bohnacker et al., 2025; ECSPM Multilingualism, 2023; House, 2003; Yiakoumetti, 2022).

The implications for ESL/EFL classrooms are significant. Incorporating ELF awareness, World Englishes, and translanguaging practices allows learners to embrace their plurilingual identities, reducing anxiety related to “native-speaker” norms and fostering more authentic communicative competence (Baker, 2021; Grosjean, 2010; Macías & Mosquera-Pérez, 2024). Teacher education and professional development play a pivotal role in equipping educators to balance the practical benefits of ELF with the preservation of linguistic diversity.

In summary, ELF is both a unifying force and a potential source of exclusion. Its positive impact is maximized when multilingual perspectives are recognized, linguistic repertoires are fully utilized, and learners are supported to navigate ELF interactions without pressure to conform to monolingual NES norms. At the same time, careful attention to the effects on minority languages and cultural identity is necessary to prevent unintended negative consequences. Future research could further investigate strategies for integrating ELF-aware pedagogies across educational levels and in different professional domains, promoting both effective communication and linguistic diversity.

6. Conclusion

This study underscores the complex and ambivalent role of ELF, which can be perceived in both a positive and a negative light depending on individual views of language, language learning, and language ideologies. On one hand, the global reach of English functions as a unifying force that facilitates communication, mobility, and knowledge exchange across academic, social, and economic domains. On the other hand, its undeniable spread, supported by underlying political and economic power, can exert implicit pressure on minority-language speakers, who may shift to a majority language for socioeconomic survival. By bringing together literature from higher education, business, and immigration contexts, this paper highlights how ELF simultaneously fosters global connection and risks reinforcing linguistic hierarchies.

Despite these insights, this analysis is necessarily limited by its concise scope and reliance on a focused literature review rather than empirical fieldwork. As such, it cannot fully capture the diverse, localized experiences of ELF users or the long-term effects of English dominance on minority languages. Future studies could extend this work through longitudinal and comparative investigations of ELF practices across different regions and social strata, exploring, for example, how ELF interacts with heritage-language maintenance, translanguaging practices, and shift-

ing language policies. Such research would help identify strategies for balancing the communicative advantages of ELF with the imperative to sustain multilingualism and cultural diversity. Overall, the findings emphasize the need for educators, policymakers, and communities to view ELF not as a neutral medium but as a dynamic sociopolitical phenomenon, which requires ongoing critical engagement to ensure that its global benefits do not come at the expense of linguistic and cultural richness.

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