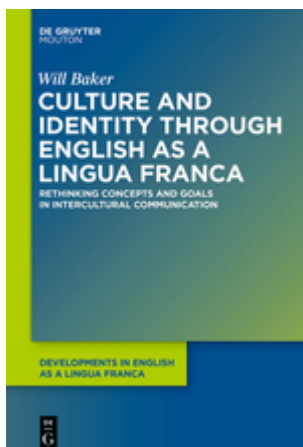# Culture and Identity through English as a Lingua Franca. Rethinking Concepts and Goals in Intercultural Communication

Will Baker

Berlin / Boston, De Gruyter Mouton, 2015, pp. 284

Reviewed by Paola Vettorel[*]

The volume delves into culture and identity with reference to English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), providing a detailed and thorough discussion of the complex interrelationships between the two aspects. Throughout the eight chapters the reader is led through the examination of in-depth issues related to Intercultural Communication, culture, identity, intercultural communicative competence and intercultural awareness, together with their implications for English Language Teaching. A case study exemplifies a course in ELF and intercultural awareness (ICA) that was realized in a university context in Thailand, and further research suggestions for interconnectedness between ELF and intercultural communication research are suggested.

After outlining the orientation of the book and providing an overview of ELF and ELF research core characteristics and issues in the Introduction, Chapter 2 – "Intercultural communication and ELF" - defines the view of intercultural communication (IC henceforth), identity and culture that is adopted in the following chapters. Conceptions of cross-cultural and intercultural communication are illustrated in a critical light, from structuralist approaches in their essentialist nature to the more recent ones of 'third places' (Kramsch 1993), 'liminality' and 'crossing' (Rampton 1995), transcultural and transnational flows (Risager 2006, 2007; Pennycook 2007; Canagarajah 2005, 2007), and interculturality (e.g. Zhu 2014). Points of divergence and convergence between research in intercultural communication and ELF are then discussed, underlining how the investigation of strategies that lead to successful communication is an important common interest. The many potential cross-over points for both areas research areas in exploring the complex relationships between language, communication, culture and identity are also highlighted.

Chapter 3 ("Understanding culture through ELF") outlines the theoretical framework of the volume, exploring in depth the connections between language, culture and communication. After a detailed presentation of relevant and influential theories of culture since the last century, the areas of culture as product, discourse, practice and ideology are discussed, and the relationships between culture, nation and globalization outlined.

---

[*] *Paola Vettorel is assistant professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures - University of Verona. Her main research interests include ELF and its implications in ELT; ELF and digital media. Among her recent publications: (2013) "ELF in international school exchanges: stepping into the role of ELF users," Journal of English as a Lingua Franca 2/1: 147-173; (2014) English as a Lingua Franca in wider networking. Blogging practices. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. (2015) (ed.) New Frontiers in Teaching and Learning English. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars.*

It is then pointed out how a different, alternative approach is needed for a full understanding of connection between language, culture and communication in our contemporary, globalized world, where traditional views of 'one language' linked to 'one (national) culture' are no longer tenable. The nexus between language and culture – the 'language-culture interface' (Risager 2012) in communicative events is explored in detail, and it is argued that complexity theory, emergentism (e.g. Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2008) and the concept of 'linguacultures' (Risager 2007) can constitute an appropriate framework to explore, define and comprehend the relationship between languages and cultures as "emerging complex systems" (85) in intercultural communication, particularly for the "multifarious and dynamic nature of ELF communication" (3). Importantly, it is pointed out how ELF is not a cultural or identity neutral medium, as has been at times suggested: rather, research has shown that ELF users can be observed "drawing on multiple cultural frames of reference in the same conversation, and moving between and across local, national and global contexts in dynamic ways" (95). Negotiation of meaning and adaptation of (multi)linguacultural resources are an integral part of ELF communicative events, and involve "a number of interrelated complex systems" such as "individual mental representations of language," "language as social system" and communication strategies (100).

Chapter 4, by looking at "Culture and identity through English as a lingua franca" complements the theoretical discussion of Chapter 2. A critical approach is adopted here, too; after outlining and discussing theories on identity and cultural identity, also in connection to globalization and interculturality and focusing on the role of language and discourse, it is argued that the complexity of construction and negotiation of identities in intercultural communication – particularly in ELF - ought to be looked at through the concept of interculturality. Research on identity and (non-)nativeness in ELF is outlined with reference to accent and lexicogrammar (idiomaticity), highlighting how different aspects of identity (national, ethnic, linguistic, cultural as well as gender, generational, racial, regional and local/global groupings) interweave in a complex, fluid, liminal and non-linear way in intercultural encounters. Participants can thus be observed in constructing "cultural identities which make the multilingual and multicultural nature of ELF communication prominent through references to both a plurality of cultures and in positioning the participants themselves as multilingual communicators" (132).

Chapter 5 ("Re-examining intercultural communicative competence: Intercultural awareness") leads into a re-conceptualization of the issues and theories discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 through a critical examination of Communicative Competence and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). It is shown how both concepts have had a significant impact in Applied Linguistics and English Language Teaching (ELT) over the last 30 years. However, they appear no longer adequate for the fluidity, hybridity and complexity of L2 use and intercultural communication, particularly in ELF contexts, above all since the native speaker is taken as a reference point, and communication strategies are seen within a deficit perspective. As it has been suggested by several scholars (Cook with 'multicompetence', e.g. 2005; Hall 2013; Leung 2005), the notion of Communicative Competence ought thus to be rethought given the plurilingual and cross-cultural characteristics of intercultural encounters through ELF. A detailed overview of alternatives to ICC (Byram 1997) is provided, and it is suggested that Intercultural Awareness (ICA) can provide an alternative and apt development of intercultural skills and ICC, one that "accounts for the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to manage the diversity of cultural practices, references and identifications documented in intercultural communication and ELF research" (13). The three levels of ICA (basic, advanced cultural awareness and intercultural awareness) are illustrated with exemplifications from data, too.

In Chapter 6 ("ELF and intercultural awareness: implications for English language teaching") a link between the first more theoretically-oriented part of the volume and possible pedagogical applications is provided: after a critique of current approaches to culture and interculture in ELF as treated in the CEFR and in ELT materials, alternative approaches are presented. In particular, Baker discusses how ICA can profitably be applied in ELT, within pedagogical approaches that take account of interculture, Global Englishes and ELF. The five-point framework - exploring the complexities of local cultures; exploring cultural representations in language learning materials; exploring cultural representations in the media and arts both online and in more 'traditional' mediums; making use of cultural informants; engaging in intercultural communication both face-to-face and electronically - is illustrated in detail. This framework, as the author remarks, is meant to be adapted to suit locally-set needs and settings.

Chapter 7 ("Putting it into practice: a study of a course in ELF and ICA for language learners in Thailand") illustrates a case study where the ICA framework was adopted within a Global Englishes perspective, providing the course rationale, topics and extracts from participants' data. The course overview, examples of learning objects and additional responses to the questionnaire are also provided in Appendixes 2, 3 and 4. The course can thus constitute an exemplification of how the re-conceptualizations discussed in the theoretical chapters can be put into practice, incorporating the plurality and complexity of English nowadays, also in intercultural terms, into pedagogic approaches.

Chapter 8 concludes the volume, offering a summary of findings for the four main research questions explored in the volume (points of convergence and divergence between ELF and intercultural communication research; the influence that studies in intercultural communication through ELF can have on understanding the relationship between culture, identity and language; the implications ELF research can have for conceptualizing ICC; the potential consequences ELF and ICA research can have for ELT, 234). The need for a closer interdisciplinary connection between IC and ELF research is underscored, particularly in the implications this can have for the ELT world.

In its in-depth exploration of this interconnectedness both from a theoretical and an applied perspective, the volume represents a valuable contribution to ELF-oriented research, both for scholars and for those involved in English language teaching.

Works Cited

Byram, Michael. *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Competence.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. 1997.

Canagarajah, Suresh. "Lingua Franca English, Multilingual Communities, and Language Acquisition." *The Modern Language Journal* 91.5 (2007): 923-939.

-- (ed.). *Reclaiming the Local in Language Policy and Practice.* Mahwah N.J./London: L. Erlbaum Associates. 2005.

Cook, Vivian. "Multicompetence. Black Hole or Wormhole?" 2005. http://homepage.ntlworld.com/vivian.c/Writings/Papers/SLRF05.htm (accessed 28/12/ 2015).

Hall, Christopher. "Cognitive Contributions to Plurilithic Views of English and Other Languages." Applied Linguistics 43.2 (2013). 211-231.

Kramsch, Claire. *Context and Culture in Language Learning.* Oxford:Oxford University Press. 1993.

Larsen-Freeman, Diane and Cameron, Lynne. *Complex Systems and Applied Linguistics.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2008.

Leung, Constance. "Convivial communication: recontextualizing communicative competence." *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 15.2 (2005). 119-144.

Pennycook, Alastair. *Global Englishes and transultural flows.* London & New York: Routledge. 2007.

Rampton, Ben. *Crossing; Language and Ethnicity among Adolescents.* London: Longman. 1995.

Risager, Karen. "Linguacultures and Transnationality: the Cultural Dimensions of Language." *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Intercultural Communication.* Ed. Jane Jackson. London: Routledge. 2012. 101-115.

-- *Language and Culture Pedagogy.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. 2007.

-- *Language and Culture: Global Flows and Local Complexity.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. 2006.

Zhu, Hua. *Exploring Intercultural Communication: Language in Action.* Abingdon: Routledge. 2014.