

# Identity and standards for English as a European Union lingua franca

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## Abstract

This article addresses, from an applied linguistics perspective, the position English maintains among the myriad of languages spoken in the European Union (EU). The linguistic make-up of EU society, as well as the language policy of the Union, is scrutinised. The role English is playing in European unification is also important for the discussion, as is the call for a re-evaluation of the norms deployed in English language teaching. The linguistic nativisation currently taking place in mainland Europe, which indicates that English is functioning more as an Outer Circle rather than as an Expanding Circle language, is juxtaposed with these developments.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

In Europe, a belief in a Herderian monocultural/monolingual social order, however misconstrued, has been with few exceptions the basis for nation-state building. As Kraus notes, 'It is in Europe where the idea of the national language originated and where it became inextricably connected with the dynamics of nation- and state-building' (2008, p. xi). For the European Union (EU), however, this belief in assumed sameness will not be the foundation for unification. Instead, there is consensus among the leaders of the EU that Europe's *volksgeist* is one of diversity (European Parliament, 2023; European Union, 1973, 2023a). The member states, while actively endorsing the strengthening of political ties, are at the same time committed to carrying out the work required to preserve the unique multicultural make-up of European society. As stated in the Treaty on European Union, the intention of the agreement between the members is to 'deepen the solidarity between their peoples while respecting their history, their culture and their traditions' (European Union, 1992). Thus, while upholding its commitment to 'unity in diversity', the EU is working vigorously to establish a foundation for political unanimity which in many respects is to have the attributes of a nation state, albeit one comprising independent countries committed to allegiance and sovereignty. Brussels is believed to have authority,

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**TABLE 1** Official languages of the European Union (European Union, 2023b).

Bulgarian	English	Greek	Lithuanian	Slovak
Croatian	Estonian	Hungarian	Maltese	Slovenian
Czech	Finnish	Irish	Polish	Spanish
Danish	French	Italian	Portuguese	Swedish
Dutch	German	Latvian	Romanian	

for example, for the negotiation of treaties and the regulation of trade tariffs, while other more local concerns, such as education at the primary and secondary levels, are believed to be left to the discretion of the individual members.

In this unification project, intended to bring together a community currently comprising approximately 450 million people, English is now recognised as the pan-European lingua franca (European Union, 2023b). However contradictory this may be in light of the official EU commitment to preserve diversity, the multitude of languages spoken in the EU makes it necessary to select one medium as the universal link between people with differing linguistic repertoires. English as the preferred universal language, however, calls into question the employment of a wide range of conventional English language teaching (ELT) practices, among them, the use of standardised British English as the sole or dominant norm in ELT and the focus on the legacies of the peoples of the Inner Circle. In the post-Brexit era, there is growing awareness of the need to abandon exclusively relying on Inner Circle norms and instead heeding the call for the deployment of pedagogical methodologies which provide the citizens of the EU with opportunities to learn to speak English proficiently for participation in European affairs, in unification, as well as in globalisation (see Modiano, 2017, 2022; Seidlhofer et al., 2006). This notion of Europeans speaking English as a means of expressing their support for European integration and the possibility of a common European identity is central to this discussion. These developments, and the subsequent proliferation of nativisation processes, indicate that the time has come for Europeans to reconstitute the English language for the new era. There is a need to determine which conceptualisation or conceptualisations of English are most suitable for documentation and communication within the EU apparatus, and for language education in schools across mainland Europe. The position English maintains, not only among the many languages spoken in Europe, but also within the EU as a procedural language among employees of EU agencies, parliamentarians, members of the European Commission and the European Council, is reviewed, as is how English operates as an additional language among the general population. This is followed by an examination of the various ELT platforms currently vying for acknowledgement across Europe. It is found that the Europeanisation of ELT better serves the interests of EU citizens.

## 2 | ENGLISH AMONG THE LANGUAGES OF EUROPE

There are 24 official EU languages (see Table 1). Both Germany and Austria are represented in the EU by German; France and Belgium by French; Belgium and the Netherlands by Dutch; and Cyprus and Greece by Greek. Luxembourg, which has three official languages, French, German and Luxembourgish, has not formally petitioned the EU with a request to make Luxembourgish an official EU language. All of the other official languages are designated as official languages in their respective member states, with only the Republic of Ireland represented by a language, Irish, which is an official language of the Republic but not its majority language (which is English). The largest community of Inner Circle speakers of English in Europe is found in the United Kingdom, population 67.7 million (Worldometer, 2023), which left the bloc on 1 February 2020. There are no substantial Inner Circle speech communities of English located on the continent (with the exception for Spain, which has circa 316,000 British residents; Statista, 2023). On mainland Europe there are five larger languages which are official EU languages: German, spoken principally in Germany and Austria (together with Switzerland circa 100 million); French, spoken in France, Belgium and Luxembourg (together

**TABLE 2** Member-state population figures in millions (European Union, 2023b).

Malta 0.5	Lithuania 2.8	Bulgaria 6.4	Czechia 10.8	Italy 58.8
Luxembourg 0.6	Croatia 3.8	Austria 9.1	Belgium 11.7	France 68
Cyprus 0.9	Ireland 5.1	Hungary 9.6	Netherlands 17.8	Germany 84.3
Estonia 1.3	Slovakia 5.4	Portugal 10.4	Romania 19	
Latvia 1.8	Finland 5.5	Greece 10.4	Poland 36.7	
Slovenia 2.1	Denmark 5.9	Sweden 10.5	Spain 48	

with Monaco and Switzerland circa 80 million); Italian (58.8 million); Spanish (48 million; in Spain there are millions of Catalan speakers, which is not an official EU language); and Polish (36.7 million). This is followed by two medium-sized languages, Dutch, spoken in the Netherlands and Belgium (circa 24 million), and Romanian (19 million). The 'big seven' can be differentiated from the 16 official languages with less than 11 million users, respectively. Collectively these languages have approximately 90 million users in the Union, and constitute one fifth of the EU population: Czech (10.8 million); Swedish, spoken in Sweden and Finland (10.8 million); Greek (10.4 million); Portuguese (10.4 million); Hungarian (9.6 million); Bulgarian (6.4 million); Danish (5.9 million); Finnish (5.5 million); Slovak (5.4 million); Croatian (3.8 million); Lithuanian (2.8 million); Slovenian (2.1 million); Latvian (1.8 million); Estonian (1.3 million); Maltese (542,000); Irish (78,000); and Luxembourgish (which is the majority language in a multilingual population of 656,000; see Table 2).

Along with the 24 official languages, there are approximately 60 indigenous regional and minority languages in the EU with 40–50 million speakers (Pasikowska-Schnass, 2016; Schilling, 2008), as well as a host of languages from Asia, Africa and the Middle East brought to the EU by new arrivals, who have been immigrating to the EU in substantial numbers for more than 50 years (such as Turkish, Arabic, Kurdish, Chinese, Farsi and Somali). Thus, there are 130–140 million people, or more than 30% of the population of the EU, who are not Inner Circle speakers of English or first-language speakers of one of the seven largest EU languages. Note as well that while English has official EU status, it does not have significant first-language representation. It is spoken as a first language by only 1% of the EU population, and the majority of these people are located offshore, in the Republic of Ireland (population circa 5.1 million), an Inner Circle context, and Malta, an Outer Circle setting with a population of 535,000 (Grech, this issue; Worldometer, 2023). While the Irish are predominantly speakers of Irish English, the Republic of Ireland has Irish as its official EU language. Note as well that within the EU, only the Republic of Ireland and Malta have English as an official language in their domestic legislation. Interestingly, Gibraltar, a British Overseas Territory with a population of approximately 33,000, has English as the official language of the government and education, and may thus qualify for recognition as a second Outer Circle context for English in Europe (Levey, 2015; Weston, 2011).

### 3 | LANGUAGE POLICY

The European Coal and Steel Community, the forerunner of the EU, was founded in 1952. The members, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, agreed, under the Treaty of Paris, 1951, Article 100, that French should be the vehicle language of the bloc. The Maastricht Treaty of 1993 (Eur-Lex, 2024), however, where no provision was made to prioritise any one language, marked the beginning of English domination, something which became undeniably apparent after the post-Cold War and Eastern enlargements of 1995 and 2004. At present, while decrees regulating language usage emphasise the ideal that all official languages have equal rights, English, French and German are deemed to be working or 'procedural' languages which in important respects take precedent over other official languages (Fidrmuc & Ginsburgh, 2007). Thus, one can sum up the official language policy as resting on the understanding that EU citizens have the right to communicate with representatives of the EU in any of the official languages. While all 24 official languages have equal status, this is contradicted by the understanding that three languages

have 'procedural language' standing. The EU, moreover, has taken action to promote the learning of two additional languages, with the goal that all EU citizens can speak three languages (Baaij, 2012; European Union, 2008; Modiano, 2022). There are also laws and regulations related to the translation and interpretation services and the drafting of official treaties and documents. Moreover, while the EU is committed to defending the linguistic rights of all of its citizens with provisions made for the protection of lesser used and minority languages (Council of Europe, 1992), there is little in EU regulatory legislation which explicitly addresses the protection of the languages of new arrivals from outside of Europe.

English is the leading link language of the majority of the 60,000 civil servants employed in EU agencies. While the Court of Justice in Luxembourg has French – with circa 2250 employees – the remaining institutions of the Union have English as their internal working language (Balič, 2016; Leal, 2021; Ringe, 2022; see also Arnulf, 2019, for the call to remove French as the primary language of the Court). English is also the language most used by elected officials in Brussels and is widely utilised in the Council and among members of the Commission. It is now the case that one cannot procure employment in the EU, or operate effectively in the political arena, without being proficient in English. Brexit, which some may have believed would weaken the standing of English in the EU apparatus, has actually acted to strengthen its status (Bolton & Davis, 2017; Modiano, 2017; Parijs, 2011). This is because English provides those working within the EU with a lingua franca that puts nearly everyone on the same footing, seeing as, with some minor exceptions for the Irish, and others, everyone is speaking a second language. This, one must assume, is especially welcomed by speakers of minority languages, including both European and non-European languages, for whom English provides a form of linguistic parity (or a 'level playing field') when interacting with speakers of major European languages.

There are conceptual gaps between policy and practice on several levels. For those working in the EU, while officially all languages have equal status, it is English which is the common medium of communication. There is also disparity in the EU policies intended to promote plurilingualism. In efforts to increase mobility among Europeans, programs intended to stimulate efforts to acquire additional languages invariably result in increasing resources being allocated to English, which for some means increased bilingualism, and a decline in motivation to acquire a second additional language (Modiano, 2023b). This official policy of parity and plurilingualism is out of sync with the prioritised position English maintains among the national, minority and immigrant languages of the Union. These inequalities are further exacerbated by the formidable support English receives from young people across the continent. The fact that English is the most used language within the EU apparatus, despite an official policy of institutional multilingualism, further reinforces the utility and prestige of the tongue, as does the fact that English is the common medium of communication on the Internet, in higher education and in the media. Thus, the increasing number of proficient users of English in the EU is primarily the consequence of five factors: (1) the top-down result of member-state governments passing the legislation which stipulates that school children have English as a compulsory subject as well as the EU promoting English through student-mobility schemes; (2) a bottom-up process wherein the citizens of the Union have taken these educational opportunities to heart, resulting in impressive outcomes; (3) the necessity to know English for employment; (4) the fact that English is the most common medium of communication internationally and (5) the utility of English for access to Internet-based applications. No other European language can compete with English in any of these respects.

There are several policy decisions which need to be taken to better position English among the languages of Europe as well as to improve the quality of language education. The most obvious question which begs to be answered, naturally, is whether the EU is to have one primary lingua franca which has official backing (Mac Giolla Chríost & Bonotti, 2018; Parijs, 2011; Somssich, 2016). Another important related issue is what action should be taken to protect lesser-used, minority, non-European and moribund languages in light of the increasing use of English. The fate of the languages spoken in the EU, large and small, is dependent on the manner in which English evolves. Moreover, Erasmus+ programs, because they so blatantly promote English, need to be reformed so that more students experience their mobility as an opportunity to learn additional languages other than English, and indeed other than the seven major EU languages (Llanes et al., 2016). There is also the need to allocate resources to Eastern and Southern Europe

**TABLE 3** EF English proficiency rankings for Europe.

1. Netherlands	13. Slovakia	25. Spain
2. Austria	14. Luxembourg	26. France
3. Norway	15. Romania	27. Ukraine
4. Denmark	16. Hungary	28. Belarus
5. Belgium	17. Lithuania	29. Russia
6. Sweden	18. Bulgaria	30. Moldova
7. Finland	19. Czech Rep	31. Georgia
8. Portugal	20. Latvia	32. Albania
9. Germany	21. Estonia	33. Armenia
10. Croatia	22. Serbia	34. Turkey
11. Poland	23. Switzerland	35. Azerbaijan
12. Greece	24. Italy	

Source: EF (2022).

so that greater numbers of school children succeed in becoming proficient in English (see Tables 3 and 4). It would be wise, as well, for member states to encourage the use of subtitles over dubbing in film and television broadcasting, seeing as subtitle usage has a positive impact on language acquisition, with learners attaining higher levels of proficiency in member states which have limited levels of dubbing (Almeida & Costa, 2014). At present there is a disparity in proficiency when one compares outcomes for the learning of English in various parts of the Union, and funding is urgently needed to address this inequality. Action should be taken by EU leadership centrally, by authorities at the individual member-state level, as well as by those responsible for local educational policy, to deal with these issues.

#### 4 | LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Ascertaining English language proficiency by member states is challenging. The Education First (EF) statistics, which according to Bolton and Bacon-Shone are 'based on the data [...] from test takers who volunteer to sit its online English language examination', are as such 'highly biased' (2020, p. 50). The EF data set shares this problem with official EU statistics, which reflect how EU citizens report on what they personally believe to be their language competencies (Eurostat, 2019; Statista, 2019). In summarising the data in Tables 3 and 4, as well as information from other sources, it is only possible to generalise when reporting on various levels of proficiency across Europe. It is fair to say, nevertheless, when comparing figures, that Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden, for example, consistently rank higher than their counterparts in Germany, as well as those in larger speech communities in the south of Europe where Romance languages are spoken (France, Italy and Spain). Moreover, while some member states in Eastern Europe fair relatively well, such as Croatia and Slovakia, others, such as the Czech Republic and Hungary, have lower scores. One possible explanation for the success of member states which have Germanic languages as their majority language is that acquiring English, which is also a Germanic language, is less challenging compared to those who have Romance and Slavic languages. There are also possible economic reasons, with member states that have Germanic languages investing more in language education at the primary and secondary school levels. Another possible reason is that speakers of smaller languages, speakers of minority languages, as well as new arrivals bringing with them Northern African, Middle Eastern and Asian languages, are more inclined to acquire additional languages, and as such more commonly have bilingual or multilingual competence, in comparison to first-language speakers of the larger European languages in the south of Europe (where monolingualism is more commonplace).

**TABLE 4** Share of population with knowledge of English.

EU member state	English proficiency
Sweden	71
Netherlands	70
Denmark	67
Luxembourg	66
Finland	66
Slovenia	65
Germany	64
Belgium	64
Austria	63
Poland	62
Romania	60
Croatia	60
Serbia	60
Portugal	60
Czechia	60
Hungary	60
Greece	58
Slovakia	58
Bulgaria	58
Lithuania	58
Spain	56
Italy	56
France	55
Estland, Latvia, Ireland, and Malta not included	

Source: Statista (2019).

English, although not a mandatory subject in primary and secondary education in all member states, is nevertheless with few exceptions the first foreign language school children pursue throughout mainland Europe, and instruction, in many member states, starts between the ages of 7 and 10. All pupils attending primary and secondary school in the EU study at least one foreign language (European Commission, 2009; Eurostat, 2019; Gerhards, 2014; NATECLA, 2019). English proficiency is a requirement in higher education for both domestic and international students throughout the EU (note that even where it is officially optional, most domestic students, as well as those from abroad, need English for their studies; European Parliament, 2014). Content- and language-integrated learning programs are commonly implemented in secondary education, and English Medium Instruction (EMI) is implemented in tertiary education (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2010). Universities across the EU offer graduate-level courses in English to attract Erasmus+ students as well as students from outside the EU. This shift from exclusively using the host-country language in tertiary education to offering an increasing number of courses in English was first implemented in Northern and Western Europe, in comparison to Eastern and Southern Europe, but even here, the use of English in higher education across Eastern and Southern Europe is on the rise. As an example of the trajectory of English across Eastern Europe, Fenyő reported in 2003, that:

In Hungary between 1949 and 1990 Russian was used as the first foreign language in primary and secondary schools as well as in higher education. After the political change interest in learning a 'Western' language began to grow and by the 2000s English has become the most widely studied foreign language. At some universities, ... English is the medium of instruction in technical and economic fields. English is also frequently used to read scientific literature and to keep up with research. In these situations English means access to information and functions like a second language. (Fenyő, 2003, p. 60)

Others have reported on the increased use of English in education across the EU (Hultgren et al., 2015; O'Dowd, 2018; Phillipson, 2015).

What is notable in contemporary Europe is that fewer learners are attempting to mimic to near perfection an Inner Circle variety while increasing numbers have a local nativised rendition of their lingua franca. Features of nativisation in pronunciation are found throughout Europe, where English language usage can also be characterised by regional accents, grammatical transfer from substrate languages and by the use of mainland European lexis. These developments, which are now more likely to gain traction going forward because of the withdrawal of the British from the Union, challenge practitioners in the EU because in many instances educational authorities require adherence to Inner Circle norms, something often reflected in national examinations. Consequently, once again, there is a clear lack of harmony between how practitioners in the EU speak English, how they teach the language, the educational materials utilised in the instruction and the exam protocols. Tollefson makes note of this in his observation that '[t]he question of which language variety should be used as a medium of instruction in ELT involves two different issues: the variety used by teachers and students in the classroom, and the target language of the learners' (2007, p. 25). Where there are discrepancies between the English spoken by practitioners, the educational norm for the instruction, and the English spoken by learners, this indicates that there is a need, not only in Europe but also anywhere English is taught and acquired as an additional language, to reform ELT.

## 5 | COMPETING NORMS FOR ENGLISH IN EUROPEAN EDUCATION

### 5.1 | Language standards across the European Union

Educational standards for English instruction have shifted considerably in the post-war period. Initially, standardised British English was the norm throughout Europe, with conventional language protocols in place and with textbooks, dictionaries, grammars and other educational materials prioritising Inner Circle renditions of standardised English (produced, for the most part, in the United Kingdom). This is because the focus of the instruction was on pursuing proficiency in English as a foreign language with the understanding that learners were striving to speak with 'native-like' proficiency (Bieswanger, 2008). Taking a wider perspective, Snodin and Resnik observe that the 'status of English as a global language has challenged the fundamental principles of how English should be learned and taught' and lament the fact that there is a 'gap between the sociolinguistic realities of English and [...] some teacher education programmes', which they note, 'are still dominated by native speakerism' (2019, p. 247). This gap arose, both across Europe and internationally, in the 1990s and forward, when a shift took place, away from grammar and translation studies, and instead, towards cross-cultural communicative competence, with the British model, in many instances, no longer the sole basis for study (Modiano, 2023a; Zieseler & Koll-Stobbe, 2014).

For example, reporting on ELT in the Canary Islands, which is a part of Spain, Cruz and Cazorla note that 'when teaching English in the 21st century, it makes little sense to restrict the limits of the language and the culture to the British sphere' (2007, p. 63). Coinciding with the decline in the prestige of the British standard, American English has become recognised, along with British English, as one of the two most common legitimate norms, and increasingly, practitioners are spending more time investigating other use of English across the Three Circles. It is now apparent, moreover, that American English is continuing to make considerable gains on the British rendition of English, and

across Europe, but especially in Northern Europe, American English is now the most common basis for the English spoken by young people attending primary, secondary and upper secondary school. Once more, there is a conceptual gap in that while learners are speaking what is more akin to American English, practitioners and the educational materials utilised in the classroom and lecture hall still, to a considerable extent, promote the British model. Richter and Weisenböck, addressing this issue in respect to ELT in Austria, ask if there is 'a trend among Austrian pre-service teachers to choose American English rather than British English', and conclude that:

while many experienced EFL teachers ... aimed at a British English accent during their university education, they increasingly find their learners being socialized in American English. This may lead to a marked discrepancy between what is taught in class and what is learned outside class. (2021, p. 1)

Examples of similar shifts in classroom teaching can be found throughout Europe.

Because English is so widely used among Europeans and has so many fundamental advantages over other languages, it is essential that the EU takes responsibility for the forms and functions of the lingua franca, and in so doing, coordinates efforts to determine what approaches to ELT and learning best suit the needs of the citizens of the EU. The problem which must be solved is quite simply the following: Now that Europe has chosen English, what variety or conceptualisation of the language should be the standard for the written language and thus for documentation within the EU apparatus, and more importantly, what varieties or conceptualisations of the language should be deemed the most utilitarian for the production of educational materials used in schools and for the standard for proficiency training in primary, secondary and tertiary education? To continue to define the use of English in Europe as Expanding Circle phenomena, and as such to see English as a foreign language, presupposes that what is most practical for teaching is a prescriptive grammar of standardised English. However, while there is currently an upswing in the popularity of the American standard, there are also, at the same time, increasing numbers of Expanding Circle speakers of English across Europe exhibiting a proclivity to promote nativisation processes that colour their language usage in respect to pronunciation but also when it comes to the use of lexical items. This is inferred by Mežek (this issue), reporting on how practitioners and learners speak English in Sweden. In such instances, mainland Europeans who have elements of nativisation in their usage are indicating with their behaviour that they are in the initial stages of establishing an alternative to standardised Inner Circle varieties. While these nativisation processes are taking place without support from Brussels, and with no overt validation on the part of member-state educational authorities, they are nevertheless having an impact on ELT. Some clarity in the matter is needed.

At present three differing visions of English, American English, British English or a mix of American and British English, are most commonly deployed by practitioners in their classroom teaching in schools across Europe, with American English apparently leading the pack in usage outside the classroom. Adults throughout mainland Europe are also speaking what is more akin to the American norm. With backing from powerful global concerns in the media and in information technology, the American version of the tongue has been able to make considerable headway in the last 30 years (Gonçalves et al., 2018). The fact that this reliance on Inner Circle norms has not been officially questioned by educational authorities centrally or at the member-state level favours the American variety. Where there is a lack of regulation, renditions of a language which have greater commercial backing tend to make gains on competing norms. This is problematical because linguistic Americanisation, when wholeheartedly adopted, does not facilitate European self-determination. It does not support efforts to have a lingua franca which can act as a site of identity for EU citizens.

It is the case, however, that there are platforms for ELT which offer practitioners and learners alternatives. One, the English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) initiative, has received considerable support among language scholars. Another, the English as an International Language (EIL) paradigm, includes a number of differing ways to envision English as a language of wider communication. There is, furthermore, the call for conceptualising English from a mainland European perspective (Berns, 1994, 2009; Carstensen, 1986; Fenyő, 2003; Modiano, 2000, 2009, 2017). Eclectic approaches to the teaching and learning of English also act as the basis for ELT in many quarters. These platforms, American English, British English, ELF, EIL, the mainland European perspective and an eclectic approach, can be utilised by practitioners



involved in mainland European ELT. Each has obvious advantages. It is perhaps their shortcomings, however, which are most relevant when deciding what norm or norms are preferable. Note as well that regardless of what standard is promoted in class, learners are nevertheless gravitating towards American English as a result of the exposure they have to that variety as well as to the fact that that particular brand of English is currently in fashion among young people not only in Europe but also throughout the world. Social media, international broadcasting networks, as well as the Internet are key drivers of this development.

## 5.2 | Inner Circle norms

Inner Circle standards deployed in ELT have considerable bearing on the identity Expanding Circle speakers of English in the EU emulate when utilising their lingua franca. When English usage is based on American or British norms, both of which now have their centre of power outside the EU, this can be perceived as indicating allegiance to the Anglo-American sphere of influence. Such use of English invariably contains markers of ideological positioning, of values, beliefs and interests prevalent among people belonging to speech communities which in some respects and to varying degrees are not necessarily characteristic of the citizens of the EU. 'Native' or 'near-native' proficiency in an Inner Circle variety can be seen as an affirmation that Inner Circle speakers of English are at the centre of things, and mainland Europeans are at the margins. Unfortunately, however, for those who want to support Inner Circle varieties in ELT in the mainland European context, faithfully striving to impersonate a 'native speaker', is out of sync with the aspirations of unification. While acceptable in the past, it has now become outmoded, at least among many Expanding Circle users of English across Europe. Both American English and British English are inadequate foundations for those Expanding Circle speakers who do not want to assimilate into the Anglo-American sphere of influence. But because of their global prominence in the production of intellectual property, as well as the fact that speakers of these varieties are collectively more than 375 million strong, they must nevertheless be taken into consideration when learners attempt to acquire proficiency in the tongue. Inner Circle users of English, their renditions of English, maintain considerable influence on people in the EU for the simple reason that many Europeans are extensively exposed to these varieties (De Wilde et al., 2020). Thus, while it is certainly not wise to ignore them, the issue is rather, if standardised American and standardised British English are not to be the sole basis for ELT, what other conceptualisations of English benefit learners in the EU, and as such can be integrated into the instruction?

## 5.3 | ELF

Those who support the ELF initiative argue that there is a need to initiate a shift in orientation for ELT as it is carried out in mainland Europe, away from a standard language ideology, 'nativespeakerism', and the consequent reliance on exonormative models, to conceptualisations of verbal communication situated in translanguaging and globalisation. It envisions the English of mainland European speakers as something separate from 'native' and 'second-language' varieties, and assumes that because Expanding Circle and Outer Circle speakers far outnumber Inner Circle speakers, a differentiation between these groups is imminent. As [Jenkins et al.](#) explicitly explain:

The position of ELF research is that the world has become so interconnected, and English so bound up with processes of globalization, that a traditional varieties orientation is no longer viable, and that we should, instead, focus on English as fluid, flexible, contingent, hybrid and deeply intercultural. (2011, p. 284)

For ELF researchers, how successful communication takes place between interlocutors in multicultural/multilingual settings is the primary concern. Thus, performance and accommodation, rather than form, are most relevant (Cogo & Jenkins, 2010; Jenkins, 2018a; Mauranen, 2012; Seidlhofer, 2001, 2011).

Perspectives on the dynamics of cross-cultural communication in ELF research are at times presented in a rather difficult to understand manner (Friedrich & Matsuda, 2010; I-Chun, 2006; Leal, 2021; Modiano, 2017; Mortensen, 2013; O'Regan, 2014; Park & Wee, 2011, 2013). For example, Ishikawa, to substantiate a general take on what constitutes ELF, claims that ELF refers to 'a dynamic, situational natural linguistic phenomenon which embraces diverse sociolinguacultural identities' (2015, p. 41). It is difficult to see how such conceptualising differs from any assessment of interaction between people with differing linguistic perspectives and experience, regardless of their status as a speaker of the language. Sebba and Harding (2018) present a variation on this theme, claiming that the focus in ELF research is on fluidity. The aim of ELF is to 'shift the focus of instruction so that learners master those features of the language which are shown to be useful for communication in ELF settings' (Sebba & Harding, 2018, p. 349). These can be, according to Jenkins '[t]he countable use of nouns that are uncountable in native English (e.g. feedbacks, advices, information), the non-marking of third-person singular in the present tense (e.g. "she think"), and the conflation of "who" and "which" (e.g. "the paper who," "the delegate which")' (2018b, p. 30).

Other ELF researchers have published similar lists of features which, while not correct within the context of a prescriptive grammar of standardised English, are perceived as germane to ELF interaction (Seidlhofer, 2004). That which, it is claimed, is not based on a prescriptive linguistic norm is treated as if it has identifiable characteristics. ELF thus has structure in that it has elements which are a basis for description. The implication is that such usage would not be considered incorrect in classrooms where ELF is the foundation of the instruction. A shortcoming here is that in allowing non-standardised usage in oral performance (that is to say, with practitioners refraining from correcting learners when they use lexical items incorrectly, use non-standardised features of syntax, or express themselves in a non-idiomatic manner), such language usage becomes more readily fossilised by learners. This in turn causes problems in that written standardised English is required in higher education, in the workplace and other professional settings, and in publishing. This discrepancy between the free adherence to grammar associated with ELF ideology and the requirements of proficiency makes acceptance of the paradigm challenging. As Bagni proclaims, in summing up the reception of ELF in a large questionnaire study carried out recently among Italian university students, 'ELF tends to be accepted in the abstract but resisted in practice' (2022, p. ii).

In ELF research, moreover, the concept of identity is ignored. No provision is provided for juxtaposing language usage with collective identity in local, regional or nation-state-based contexts. It would seem that the ELF contingency finds a sense of membership within the nation state, through the use of a second-language variety, to be redundant in this age of globalisation (Chopin, 2018; Mocanu, 2022). Proponents of ELF prefer to see hybridity and fluidity as better descriptions of how personal space and agency are hypothesised and take as a given the understanding that all use of English on the part of non-Inner Circle speakers is defined as 'ELF'. This renders irrelevant the distinction between English as a foreign language and English as a second language. Yet, in line with the fundamental tenets of Kachruvian sociolinguistics, the recognition of the second-language variety, as it is used in local contexts, substantiates the understanding that second-language users are members of a unique speech community, one which has its own rendition of English. In a commentary on Europe, Jenkins claims that:

EU English (i.e., ELF) will increasingly move away from native English, [and] because the EU [...] is so powerful and influential, any developments in English/ELF use within its institutions and member states are likely to spread out first to the whole of Europe and then beyond. (2018b, p. 31)

Note that Jenkins here uses 'EU English' and ELF as synonyms, and moreover, that the term ELF is used as a noun. Yet, 'ELF is *not* a variety of language' (Baker & Jenkins, 2015, p. 193). Jenkins is claiming that European English will in time compete worldwide with American English despite the fact that there is no evidence which substantiates the claim that the Englishes of continental Europe are impacting on the way English is evolving elsewhere. It is first and foremost American English which has the greatest influence internationally. The English which one hears as it is spoken by European speakers is in many respects unique, with its culture-specific terms and expressions (such as *euro*, *member state*, *plurilingualism* and *the four freedoms*), and its regional variation in

pronunciation, emphasised by the increasing absence of 'near-native' or 'native' oral proficiency in Inner Circle norms.

It seems likely that the citizens of the EU will continue to be committed to their loyalty to their nation state and to their membership in their first-language speech fellowship. At the same time, it is equally likely that many will distance themselves from the Anglo-American sphere of influence through the use of an English which is distinctly European. For those who have or want to have an international profile in their use of English, there is little differentiation here between the European and international expression of identity beyond the realm of situational adaptation (e.g. esoteric European terminology avoided when interacting with others in international forums). As Europeans move forward with unification, this sense of the European imagination expressed in English, which is intimately linked to their international profile, will become increasingly apparent, as will the benefits of participating in Europeanisation and internationalisation. This provision, that the use of an Expanding Circle English which systematically differs from established Inner Circle norms can be the site of local, regional or nation-state identity, is missing in the ELF paradigm.

## 5.4 | EIL

EIL, originally theorised in the 1970s and 1980s by Smith (1976), is one of many attempts to envision English as a global medium of communication. Other terms include 'English as an international language', 'English as a world language', 'World Standard Spoken English'/'World Standard Written English' and world Englishes (which is an umbrella term for the multitude of varieties across the Inner, Outer and Expanding Circles). These conceptualisations of English do not signify a reduced or simplified form of the language, such as 'International Aviation English', Quirk's (1981) promotion of 'Nuclear English' or Ogden's (1930) 'Basic English'. Instead, EIL, like other international takes on English, can be seen as having the potential to become a fully developed and sophisticated usage (Clyne & Sharifian, 2008; Modiano, 1999a, 1999b; Pennycook, 2017; Sharifian, 2009). EIL is meant to denote the use of English in multicultural forums. It entails the conscious effort to avoid culture-specific features when they are potentially incomprehensible to those participating in the communicative act. Situational adaptation, the avoidance of esoteric terms, expressions and references, is always relevant to communication between individuals with different backgrounds and experience.

EIL offers learners an alternative to the pursuit of an Inner Circle accent. It is a teaching and learning platform which focuses on cross-cultural communication, and it has as its basis the understanding that the use of those features which are in the common core are appropriate for international communication. EIL, for the 'non-native speaker', promotes the development of 'identity' outside the parameters of Inner Circle constituencies. Outer Circle and Expanding Circle speakers, in using EIL, are provided a space where their international profiles can come into being as manifestations of their own sociocultural and thus linguistic reality. The EIL philosophy, moreover, includes the provision that for those speakers who have varieties which are challenging for people they encounter in multicultural/multilingual settings, code-switching to EIL is judicious. EIL is relevant for Europeans because Expanding Circle users of English in mainland Europe acquire English not only to facilitate communication across Europe but also for its efficacy internationally. An EIL perspective on ELT benefits those in Europe who aspire to participate in globalisation.

## 5.5 | European norms

One can envision the English of mainland Europeans as lingua franca usage which has unique characteristics, and moreover, extensive regional differentiation, something common to large speech communities extending across Inner Circle speech communities. There is, despite this, a substantial amount of systematicity. Like established Outer Circle Englishes such as Indian English or Nigerian English, the Expanding Circle English of Europeans contains culture-specific features of pronunciation, grammar and lexis which can be addressed in ELT. It is, at this point in time however, not possible to know if this will eventually result in legitimisation, codification and standardisation. At present there

is little support for such a development, despite the fact that Brexit, and the increased popularity of the American variety, has destabilised many hitherto common ELT beliefs and practices. One might have expected the power vacuum created by the withdrawal of the British from European unification to lead to a greater acceptance of a mainland European rendition of English. Instead, there is a stalemate, something which has been exacerbated by a number of studies that discredit a European take on the English language. Perhaps the most well known is the critique carried out by Mollin (2006; and in reply, Garcia, 2009; Modiano, 2007). Mollin claims that there is insufficient evidence of a European variety, despite the fact that radical nativisation is found in the Euro-speak of Eurocrats in Brussels, as well as, to a much lesser extent, in the general population of the EU (Kuzelewska, 2021). Mollin's study, based on a large-scale survey, has been called into question because most of the informants received their training in English long before information technology radically changed the role English now maintains in Europe. Like a more recent study, Gnutzmann et al. (2014) which also attempts to substantiate that there is little support for a European English, it is likely that the informants in both these studies had an inadequate understanding of what conceptualising English in the European context entails. Moreover, the Gnutzmann et al. (2014) study, like Mollin's work, was conducted among speakers of German, the largest first-language speech community in the EU.

Before one can refer to any reliable data about the attitudes prevalent among mainland Europeans, one needs to have a clear understanding of what constitutes a European conceptualisation of the English language and have assurances that the informants are aware of the implications of the proposal before they express their sentiments regarding whether it is suitable to be included in ELT. Secondly, a differentiation must be made between the attitudes of speakers of larger European languages and those in Europe who have lesser-used languages. In a number of studies carried out in Sweden, for example, it is evident that the recognition of a particular European use of English is gaining support among learners (Modiano, 2020). Mohr et al. indicate a possible opening in this respect in their comment on Swedish practitioners:

Some teachers, especially in Sweden, already use more ideologically neutral varieties of English than the traditional native target varieties BrE and AmE, thus emphasizing the idea of communicative competence as teaching goal. Individual European Englishes seem very well suited for (international) communication and time will tell whether they can and will substitute native targets in European EFL classrooms. (2021, p. 90)

Friedrich and Matsuda also acknowledge the possibility of European English:

We recognize that if and when there is a relatively stable community using English for international communication (e.g., European Union [EU]), some consistent patterns emerge and may even result in a distinctive new variety of English. [...] Studying such linguistic characteristics enhances our understanding of the nature of linguistic nativization and change while it also helps us draw a linguistic and sociolinguistic profile of a particular speech community. (2010, p. 28)

It is thus apparent that there is a need for studies of the characteristics of Expanding Circle usage in Europe among adolescents and young adults who have grown up at a time when using English to access the Internet is their common experience. It is evident that this will become an increasingly interesting and innovative area of academic research and engagement in the coming years.

## 5.6 | Eclectic norms

The adoption of an eclectic norm is a pragmatic way in which to promote the learning of languages of wider communication. Such a basis for ELT assures that several approaches to language teaching and learning are utilised in the

instruction. This diminishes the importance of American and British varieties while allowing greater opportunities for investigation of the dynamics of cross-cultural communication. In this way, more time can be allotted to platforms such as ELF, EIL and other perceptions. As such, the eclectic approach provides learners with the best of both worlds, seeing as they are encouraged to increase their knowledge of Inner Circle varieties while at the same time provision is made for focus to be put on the benefits of learning more about second-language varieties, as well as about the speech behaviour of those who have English as a foreign language.

## 5.7 | Towards a European perspective on English norms

The most pressing aspect of these processes of determining what norm or norms best suit the needs of Europeans is that of identity. Is it possible to recognise Expanding Circle English, spoken by a citizen of the EU, as a site of mainland European identity? An even more complex question is the issue of acceptance. Is it likely that the project itself, that of defining the forms and functions of English from a mainland European point of view, can receive acceptance in the EU? Perhaps this is putting the cart before the horse, so to speak, because as a starting point there should be an assessment of how adequate support is for the idea of a collective mainland European identity (Grimm, 2021; Shore et al., 2021). Do Europeans on the continent want to project an image of themselves as citizens of the EU when speaking their lingua franca (Salomone & Salomone, 2022)? The premise here is that there will be increasing support for European citizenship among those who are active in fields where one interacts with people from throughout Europe and indeed from throughout the world. This sense of inclusion is based on one's membership in European and global cooperation schemes, where face-to-face encounters as well as exchanges which take place via text, voice and video communications systems facilitate working together in the pursuit of common goals.

Many of those who embrace European integration have already taken the initial steps in presenting themselves as participants in unification processes, and moreover, increasing numbers have an understanding that when they use their English, aside from their primary identity in their first language, English provides them with opportunities to express a European and international identity (Aichholzer et al., 2021). A sense of a collective European identity can already be found among professionals working in higher education, where internationalisation has been a key concern for some time. Many who work in the business sector have also embraced this mindset. Thus, because there is already a sizable community of people actively using the English language primarily due to its utility within mainland Europe, this can very well be seen as something relevant to the teaching and learning of the language in formal educational settings. The impact that English is having on the sociocultural fabric of European society, which is on the increase, is paving the way for such a development.

An important aspect of providing an alternative/complement to Inner Circle norms, and instead basing ELT, to some extent, on the role English now maintains in the EU, is that such positioning provides learners with a teaching and learning platform which has Europe in focus – its cultures, history, institutions and political make-up – so that learners are better equipped to discuss their own sociocultural realities when communicating with others. Seeing as most EU citizens primarily use their English in interaction with other mainland Europeans, negotiating the complexities of cross-cultural communication in such contexts has greater utility when compared to targeting skill in communication with Inner Circle speakers. Such positioning also provides learners with an alternative to the 'native speaker' conundrum. This line of reasoning has its roots in the liberation linguistics of Braj Kachru, who argued convincingly for recognition of localised varieties of English in postcolonial settings (Kachru, 1982, 1986).

One important tenet of Kachru's world Englishes paradigm is that recognising local conventions, and in turn initiating codification and standardisation processes based on such observation, when allowed to influence the manner in which ELT is carried out, supports learners in that the Outer Circle English which they speak is accepted as legitimate usage. The variety which arises in such contexts can be seen as a site of resistance to colonial rule and the subsequent neocolonialism which often arises in the developing world. It moves the centre of the tongue away from the previous locus of power to a space where Outer Circle users of English can take responsibility for how their

use of English is hypothesised. They move from being on the margins to becoming central in the way their speech is defined.

The recognition of European nativisation processes can possibly have this function. It can potentially offer mainland European Expanding Circle users of English an opportunity to determine the manifestations of English for use in the EU, and in so doing, provide them with an opportunity to claim ownership of the language. It can also act as a site of resistance to broadscale Anglo-Americanisation. Yet, however logical and compelling such a take on the English language may seem, it is uncertain if such a development will be officially sanctioned in the foreseeable future. This is because it is possible that decision makers in Brussels will not make any formal attempts to base document standards on mainland Europe usage, and at the member-state level, it is possible that no effort centrally will be made to ensure that the mainland European perspective is relevant in the teaching and learning of English. It is possible that the current inability to act will continue unabated. However, there is evidence that the Europeanisation of oral and written English can already be observed in the inner workings of the EU, where a great deal of interagency communication contains features of local nativisation (Bolton & Davis, 2017). It is also the case that there is nativisation in the usage of EU citizens. Consequently, regardless of what is done by governments, Europeanisation processes which are altering the way English is expressed in this part of the world will continue to evolve. This is evidently a clear indication that there is a need for a European standard for written documentation which is based on the usage of the citizens of the EU and not on Inner Circle speakers from outside the Union (Modiano, 2023a). It is also the case that practitioners are gravitating towards a more European-friendly take on ELT. There is as well, at present, a growing body of esoteric features – lexical items, aspects of grammar and pronunciation, and expressions – which are culture-specific for the English that is in widespread use in the EU, and these features are becoming increasingly systematic (Modiano, 2017). Without the British present to protect the structural integrity of their rendition of standardised English, increasing nativisation is rendered a historical inevitability, and as such, the English of mainland Europeans, represented both by those working within the EU apparatus and by the population at large, will continue to gravitate away from Inner Circle standards.

When looking at the practical side of the issue, providing learners with an opportunity to approach English from a European perspective has several advantages. For one, learning to speak English without attempting to mimic to near perfection Inner Circle speaker pronunciation is less arduous. Instead, more time and energy can be devoted to studying the characteristics of English as it is used in speech communities across the Outer and Expanding Circles. More importantly, learning how to discuss mainland Europe, something that European users of English inevitably do to a considerable extent when they use their lingua franca, is more useful when compared to the pursuit of knowledge of American and British society (which many learners acquire anyway because of their media exposure). Learners are influenced by their active and passive exposure to English, and here, while much of this contact with English is with Inner Circle speech and written material composed of standardised English, it is also the case that the citizens of the EU encounter a great deal of non-Inner Circle English during the course of their lives, and these experiences of American and British English, and of other varieties, as well as transfer from their first languages are, in a great many cases, the basis of the English which mainland Europeans speak.

## 6 | CONCLUSION

In the post-Brexit era, mainland Europeans in increasing numbers are experiencing their English as a tool in cross-cultural communication rather than as a medium which facilitates interaction with members of Inner Circle speech communities. It is also apparent that the widespread use of English in the EU is playing a leading role in Europeanisation and thus, possibly, in the emergence of a mainland European identity. As Kraus notes, 'language has a great bearing on how a community and its members understand "themselves"' (2008, p. 10). This holds true not only for one's first language but also for additional languages when they are used extensively as lingua francas in multilingual societies. Language is a behaviour which, in social interaction, substantiates an individual's membership in specific communities. Identities are expressed by the utilisation of 'markers of belonging', and that which is articulated through

the use of features characteristic of a speech community, its pronunciation norms, grammar, lexical registers and discourse strategies are among the most salient ways an individual can claim group belonging beyond the identification expressed in the first language. Mainland Europeans increasingly join in this celebration of their European identity through their behaviour as competent speakers of the lingua franca, and in this way support unification. What perhaps distinguishes the EU from other communities throughout the world, in this respect, is the vast number of languages spoken in Europe, many of which have a distinguished heritage as a written and spoken medium reaching back several centuries and which have, moreover, disseminated across the globe, obtaining large numbers of speakers beyond Europe. Mainland Europe, in taking on the challenges of unification, will need to negotiate the rise of English as the universal lingua franca in this complex linguistic environment. Indeed, novel approaches will be required to find some equilibrium in this current chaotic situation.

It is perhaps time now for mainland Europeans pursuing knowledge of the English language to come to terms with the impositions of exclusively targeting Inner Circle varieties in ELT. Both American English and British English, when successfully acquired, fail to provide mainland Europeans with a sense of identity as citizens of the EU. Other conceptualisations of the language, which do not call for the targeting of 'native' proficiency in an Inner Circle variety, are better suited for those who want to project a European identity when using their lingua franca. At present there are a number of approaches available which offer mainland Europeans alternatives to the 'nativespeakerism' inherent in conventional ELT, and these should be taken into consideration by practitioners across the EU when teaching English to EU citizens. Recognising alternatives to conventional ELT validates European empowerment. Quite simply, English, for mainland Europe, is best defined by the citizens of the EU. Determining the direction which English is to take symbolises the right on the part of the peoples of the EU to define the forms and functions of their universal language.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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