

What might 'English' mean today?

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APPLIED LINGUISTICS

Overview

- Discussion 1: The identity of English
- My reflections on changes during my career
- Two or three areas of recent change and potential implications for practice
- Discussion 2: Your thoughts on the implications for teaching
- My thoughts on what learners may need today and tomorrow
- Questions, comments, critique

Discussion 1:

The identity of English

- What is 'English' today in your opinion?
- Is it *simply* a language (if so, whose?), or something more?
- How would your students answer the previous 2 questions?
- How has your understanding of 'what English is' changed over your career, if at all? What developments have influenced such changes?
- How do you perceive the identity of English may change in the future?



Some changes since I started teaching...

- My first class, back in...

1996

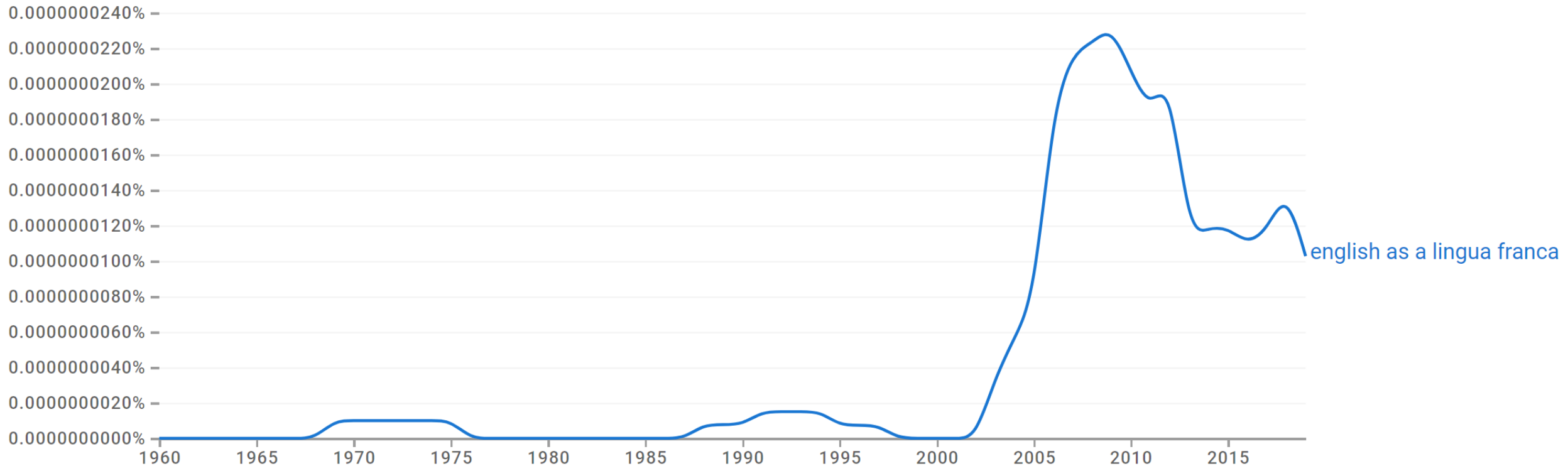
- Since then:
- The internet (practically speaking)
- Smartphones
- Social media
- Common European Framework
- **English as a lingua franca**
- **Translanguaging**
- CLIL
- **The TEFL equity movement**



English as a lingua franca

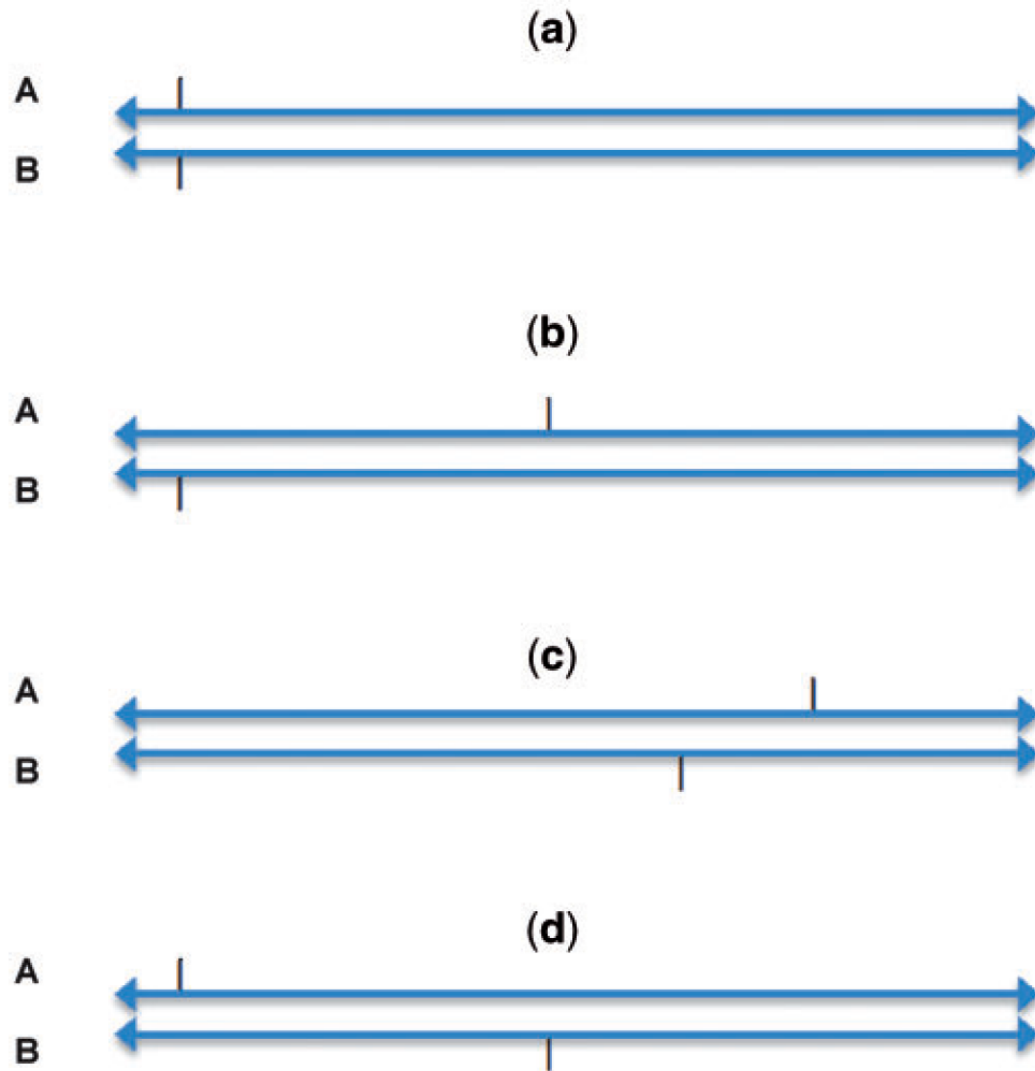
- **How would proponents answer the question: ‘What is English?’**
- English is “a contact language among speakers of different first languages” ... “[It is] not amenable to being captured in descriptions of static norms” (Jenkins & Leung, 2017, p. 103)
- English is no longer the (sole) property of native speaker communities (Widdowson, 1994)
- “ELF is not a thing. It is a way.” (Sifakis, 2017, p. 288) Teachers should focus on “raising ELF awareness instead of teaching ELF” (p. 292)
- 3 phases: ELF 1) attempted codification of features; ELF 2) focused on processes of communication; ELF 3) English as ‘a multilingua franca’: English as part of wider [translingual] repertoires (Jenkins, 2015)

ELF decline? Or 'integration' into EFL and ESP*?



- Google Ngram; *Sifakis, 2017.

Sifakis's ELF knowledge and integration continua



- Line A: How much does a teacher know about ELF
- Line B: To what extent is their teaching ELF-aware
- Many teachers today may be 'Ds' – integrating it (in part) without necessarily knowing about it as a theoretical construct
- (Sifakis, 2017, p. 300)

English as a lingua franca: Has anything changed?

Personal observations:

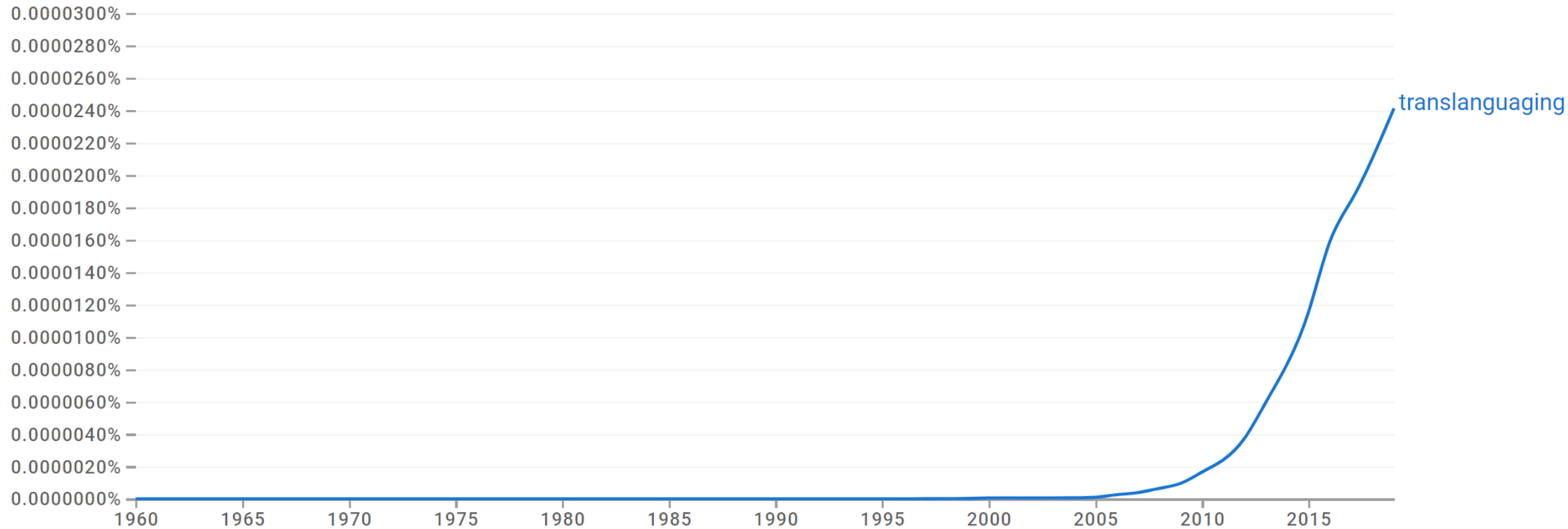
- Since 2000, many more textbooks, incl. global, include ELF users in audio and video content.
- Pronunciation teaching has become more focused on ensuring intelligibility rather than native-speaker-like pron (see, e.g., Hancock, 2018)
- References to native-speakers have almost completely disappeared on proficiency band descriptors (e.g., CEFR, IELTS writing)
- IELTS examiners (and assessment band descriptors) focus much more on message communication and meaning, rather than form.
- **Personal:** I've pretty much stopped using my 'pronunciation learning cards' (Anderson, 2006), and changed my understanding of good and not so good English in class.
- **But:** Have we really moved away from native-speaker usage as a basis for our norms in English language assessment? Can we?

Any others?

Translanguaging

- **How would proponents answer the question: ‘What is English?’**
- English is an invention, a myth, a “social construct” (Pennycook & Makoni, 2020, p. 46) or a political construct (Li Wei, 2021).
- English is a “sedimented” repertoire of local languaging practices. “The separation of languages with different labels needs to be problematized. Labeling is an ideological act of demarcating certain codes in relation to certain identities and interests.” (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 6).
- Translanguaging is the “flexible use of resources from more than one ‘language’ within a single system, *transcending* traditional understandings of separate languages.” (Anderson, 2018a, p. 27)

The 'translingual turn'*



Google Ngram; *e.g., Hirsu & Zacharias (2019)

Translanguaging: Is anything changing?

- ‘Using the L1’ is more widely accepted, esp. in shared-L1 classes.
- ‘Codeswitching’ has become destigmatised.
- Translation has been reclaimed (Cook, 2010; Kerr, 2014).
- Mediation is gaining importance (e.g., Chiappini & Mansur, 2021).
- A resource (repertoire) that many teachers share with their learners has become valued:
 - [A translingual teacher] is able to understand, interpret, scaffold, and challenge their learners’ choice of linguistic resources appropriately. Importantly, s/he is also able to model effective translingual and monolingual practices across the translingual continuum. (Anderson, 2018a, p. 34).
- Pedagogies are appearing (e.g., Cenoz & Gorter’s “pedagogical translanguaging”; 2021; CUNY’s translanguaging guides; e.g., Celic & Seltzer, 2011) and others are validated (e.g., Butzkamm & Caldwell’s ‘bilingual reform’; 2009)

But implications for some ELT contexts are less clear (e.g., mixed-L1 classes)

- Essentially we're adding a few more options to ideas for L1 use in 'multilingual classes' (see Kerr, 2014).
- E.g....
- [Jason's magic translator](#)
- [Jason's ideas for translanguaging \(e.g., translingual news jigsaw\)](#).



TEFL equity movement

- How would proponents answer the question?
- English is a tool for discrimination. A birth right if you look right/white. Others remain 'local English teachers' ('LETs'; e.g., Copland et al., 2016) with no apparent right to mobility... or they have to hide their identity, or prove it.
- Proponents argue that distinguishing between native and non-native English-speaking teachers (NESTs and NNESTs) is irrelevant and discriminatory, esp. in employment, where discrimination is rife; such discrimination is referred to as 'native-speakerism' (Holliday, 2017).
- Discrimination can happen both ways (Lowe & Kiczkowiak, 2017).
- Such discrimination is often tied up with racio-linguistic discourses concerning who is outwardly perceived to have the right to claim English as part of their identity, esp. in certain national contexts (e.g., Kubota, 2022)
- Many competent teachers experience imposter syndrome: "...people think 'Oh my God, you're non-native, but you're teaching in England!'" (Anderson, 2018b, p. 43).



- A highly-qualified, regular conference speaker and ELT author received this response recently to a job application.
- She took them to an EU employment discrimination tribunal and won quite a lot of money! 😊

**Change is
happening...
slowly**



Discussion 2: Implications for teaching

- How, if at all, has your teaching of 'English'/Englishes changed over the years you've been teaching as a result of changes to the identity of English?
- If it has changed, why? If it hasn't changed, why not?
- Example 1: At times, I avoid telling students that 'X is right' and 'Y is wrong', instead referring to clear/unclear English, appropriate/inappropriate English and I reference notions of 'correct English' with varieties (e.g., standard UK or US English).
- Example 2: I don't teach the British English phonemic set religiously, esp. not for productive purposes, only referencing it for receptive use if appropriate, and acknowledging variety within it.

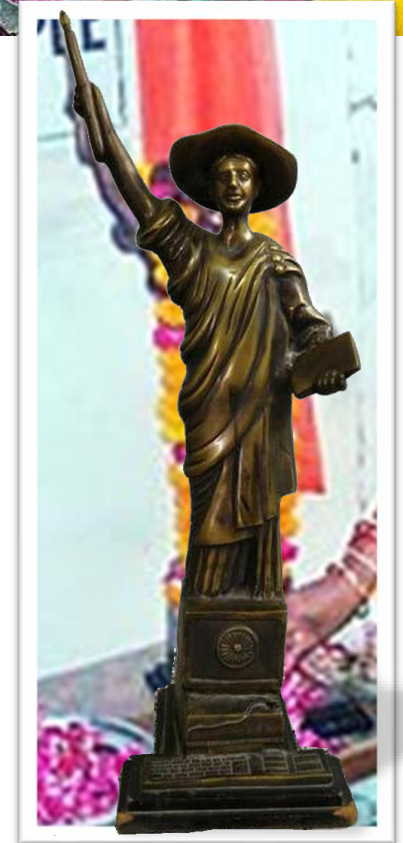
What will and won't learners need from their teachers?

What have I overlooked?

- Many won't need **a** national variety (e.g., UK English) but will need receptive awareness of **multiple** national varieties (incl. emerging ones).
- Some will need to use English in increasingly translingual work environments (juggling languages and modalities; Anderson, 2018a).
- Many will need new English literacies (e.g., academic English literacy for studies; ICT English literacy for work; social media English literacy for leisure) – most of which are actually written, not spoken.

Concluding thoughts

- English is today simultaneously a means and object of social hegemony and oppression, while also (paradoxically) a means of potential opportunity and promise for the oppressed: the 'milk of a lioness' (Pandey, 2011)
- It is simultaneously a fuzzy, porous dynamic system to be mastered, a set of resources that fit into wider repertoires, and even, at times, a way of being – a set of social practices
- English is today nobody's property yet everybody's tool to be appropriated and exploited (Canagarajah, 1999)
- More than ever, we, and our learners need 'symbolic competence' in English (Kramsch, 2006); the ability to be good at **Englishing**, not at 'English' (whatever that is).



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