

Rethinking English Language Certification

New Approaches to the Assessment of English as an Academic Lingua Franca

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5 The Spread of English as an Academic Lingua Franca in Europe

Keywords This is a key chapter in the book since it analyses the rapid growth of English as a lingua franca in Europe, and the slow but necessary acknowledgement of its significance by European institutions. After an overview of the kinds of lingua franca interaction which have become an everyday reality in Europe, we focus on universities, and student and teacher mobility, noting that even those students who do not themselves go on mobility may need to interact with international students, or attend lectures given (in English) by non native speakers. In addition, new certification needs have been further driven by the growing phenomenon of English medium instruction, and the recent appearance of first level courses, as well as master's degrees, delivered entirely through the medium of English. These courses are likely to set minimum levels of competence in English for applicants: but which English? We argue for a new rationale for assessing English as a lingua franca to access higher education in Europe.

5.1 What Is English Lingua Franca?

The term "English as a lingua franca" (ELF) began to gain currency at the start of the new millennium, acknowledging the undeniable fact that English had become the preferred language of international communication. Of course, the spread of English around the world was a much earlier phenomenon, inextricably linked to British colonial expansion and American economic clout, and the subsequent adoption of English as a working or official language in institutions such as the United Nations organization and the European Union. But it is probably true that the process received its greatest impetus, in Europe at least, during the 1980s. The end of the "short century", to use the term defined by Hobsbawm (1995), saw the levelling of the Berlin wall separating East and West, the beginning of the age of the Internet, a spurt in the process of globalization, and an intensification of English language teaching, including (in Italy and elsewhere) the introduction of primary foreign language teaching.

Curiously, this period had provided the background for a number of prophetic dystopian visions of the future which focused on changes to the English language. The most well known is probably Orwell's *1984* with its controlled language, called "newspeak", which has been made the official language of the western superpower known as Oceania. Anthony Burgess

also imagined the 1980s¹ as the setting for his 1962 novel *A Clockwork Orange* and its invented, Russian-based, slang called “Nadsat”. But the most comprehensive futuristic vision of English as a lingua franca is to be found in H.G. Wells *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933) in which the First Basra Conference, which determines the emergence of the Modern State, also paves the way for Basic English (a simplified version of English proposed by C.K. Ogden in 1925 as a teaching tool) to become the world’s lingua franca:

[English] had many natural advantages over its chief competitors, Spanish, French, Russian, German and Italian. It was simpler, subtler, more flexible and already more widely spoken, but it was certainly the use of Basic English which gave it its final victory over these rivals. (431)

All of these visions provide insights into language use and language change, but none of them capture the defining feature of the lingua franca, which is its variability. Although, as we shall see, it may be possible to identify formal features (phonological, grammatical or lexical) which regularly recur in ELF interaction, and which are not part of any standard description of English, it is the users who shape the content and co-construct the language. Seidlhofer (2011, 7) defines ELF as:

Any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option.

This is a broad definition, since it can include a native speaker as one of the participants in the interaction. Most researchers, however, focus on what happens in interactions in which both, or all, participants are non-native speakers, since the dynamics change considerably when a native speaker, applying native speaker norms, is involved. In this book, we take the term *ELF* to refer to the use of English by non-native speakers.

What makes ELF any different from EFL, a term which has been in use for decades, and which refers to “English as a foreign language”? For MacKenzie (2015) it is

an outlook or an *attitude*: while EFL learners make *mistakes* (or errors), ELF users are said to show a lot of *variety*: instead of restricting themselves to the realizations of native English speakers, they exploit unused latent possibilities of English morphology, syntax and phraseology.

1 Reported in *The Guardian*, April 13 2015. URL <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/apr/13/100-best-novels-clockwork-orange-anthony-burgess> (2017-10-27).

This insight is illuminating, but it does not reveal the whole picture. The EFL learner and the ELF user may indeed be one and the same person, but the EFL learner can be simply described in terms of language acquired or learnt (for example, through a Framework-related proficiency test), whereas the ELF user needs to be described in terms of a range of pragmatic, multilingual, extra-linguistic, and cross-cultural competences which include accommodation, negotiating strategies, code-switching, and cultural referencing (Archibald, Cogo and Jenkins 2011). If the learner is traditionally seen (e.g. Selinker 1972) on a chronological axis, situated at a specific point somewhere on an impossible journey towards a destination – native speaker competence – which can never be reached, the ELF user is best seen synchronically, moving freely across a plane, reinventing the communicative act in every interaction, with the help of his or her interlocutor.

5.2 Research into ELF

Language use in ELF is meaning-focused. It is less likely to be form-focused than learner English, and less likely to be used as a badge of cultural identity than it might be by a native speaker. It needs to be transparent, not only because of the limited resources (in English) that the speaker might be able to deploy, but also because of the potential limited resources of the interlocutor. Thus economy of language, simplification, and overgeneralization of rules are common. A first wave of ELF research focused on formal features, such as lexicogrammar (Seidlhofer 2001, 2003) and phonology (Jenkins 2000). Seidlhofer (2001, 149) notes commonly recurring non standard features, such as the absence of the third person *s*, wrong prepositions in V + PREP combinations (*spend money to* something), or *who* used as a default relative pronoun. Jenkins proposes a “core phonology” which includes those phonemes and other speech phenomena (such as nuclear stress, but not word stress) which she believes are essential for comprehension, and relegates others (such as interdental fricatives and stress timing) which she thinks are not; an opinion which seems to be supported by the fact that there are native speaker varieties of English which also lack these features.

But ELF is not a single describable variety of English. If it were, it might be taking its place alongside emerging new varieties in a World Englishes paradigm, in what Schneider (2007) refers to as the “endonormative phase” in his dynamic model of postcolonial Englishes, and groping its way towards a set of fixed norms. This of course is not the case – ELF is a variable, not a variety, and its norms, if it has any, are fluid. Thus the focus in ELF research began to move away from language features to user strategies, from product to process. Early work on speech accommodation theory by Giles (1973) and Coupland and Giles (1988) provided the ELF movement with a powerful tool

for describing interaction between speakers with very different language competences. The research effort grew with studies of signalling strategies (Cogo 2010), repetition (Cogo 2009), paraphrasing (Kaur 2009), idiom creation (Pitzl 2009) intonation (Pickering and Litzenberg 2011), using shared linguistic resources such as cognates (Hulmbauer 2011) and other ploys to co-construct meaning in ELF.

Basso (2012), who spent a year in an international humanities faculty in Venice where students came from a range of language backgrounds, and where the official language was English throughout the campus, confirms the use of strategies such as these in the co-construction of meaning, but also indicates how a growing awareness of the role and nature of ELF on the part of students, and their own self-awareness as users of ELF, but also as speakers of other languages, can contribute to successful communication. The role of ELF users as multilinguals offers new research perspectives for ELF, and one which Jenkins (2015) has developed in her attempt to 'reposition' ELF research, widening the context to include multilingual phenomena such as translanguaging. She suggests that ELF research is now entering, or should be entering, a third phase, "ELF 3", after having had "an uneasy sense that ELF research was becoming too self-contained, too repetitive, and was lacking the cutting edge it had previously had" (Jenkins 2015, 62). She also appears to be addressing criticism, such as O'Regan (2014) who sees ELF research as reifying ELF as a stable form (a criticism which has long been levelled at ELF researchers, but which is difficult to sustain), but also, as Jenkins seems to be admitting, in need of continuous and vigorous re-theorization.

5.3 The Reality of ELF in Europe

More than a decade of ELF research has gone hand-in-hand with the relentless advance of English as a lingua franca in Europe. The way had been paved, we suggested, in the 1980s. The expansion of the European Union to include former Eastern Bloc countries accelerated the growth of English as the main working language of the Union, in place of French, while the intensification of English language teaching in schools contributed to the steady growth of young Europeans able to communicate efficiently in English. In the 2012 Eurobarometer survey *Europeans and their Languages* it is the youngest age bracket interviewed (15 to 24 year olds) which contains the highest percentage (27%) of respondents who answer "very good" to the question "Is your English very good, good or basic?".²

2 *Europeans and their Languages*, 27. Report published by the European Commission (June 2012). URL http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_386_en.pdf (2017-04-10).

There are economic implications associated with this development, too. In 2013, as the UK was preparing for the Brexit referendum, the German President Joachim Gauck called for the British to stay in Europe – and for English to become the official language of the Union.³ This was not just an emotional plea, but a reminder of the high costs of translation which the Union has to bear – around €350m per year⁴ – for an army of more than two thousand translators shuttling between the 24 national languages all of which have equal status, and are thus entitled to translations of all documents. A single official language would drastically cut costs in one fell swoop. Ironically, with the UK voting to leave the EU in the 2016 referendum, and Ireland having promoted Irish (Gaelic) as the official working language of the Irish republic, there were subsequent calls from members of the European Parliament to have English removed as an official language of the EU, although this possible future scenario was excluded by the European Commission.⁵

The English used in European Institutions has been the object of a number of studies. In her full-length report *Euro English: Assessing Variety Status* Mollin (2006) weighs up the evidence for and against the emergence of “Euro-English” as a separate variety of the language (which, on the basis of ELF research quoted above, would take it beyond the sphere of ‘pure’ ELF interaction). Using a corpus of spoken and informal written English entirely taken from the proceedings of European institutions, Mollin finds plenty of examples of deviant forms (deviant, that is, from native speaker norms), such as omission or wrong use of articles, ubiquitous tag *isn't it?*, and wrong prepositions, noting, on the way, only a very small number of instances of missing third person marker. Investigating possible emerging new forms and functions, such as the use of *already* as a focus particle due to mother tongue influence, she finds inconclusive evidence for attributing variety status to Euro-English. In contrast, an English native speaker translator at the European Parliament, Jeremy Gardner, lists 89 words which have assumed a different meaning in European use, such as *actor* (= someone who does something) or *control* (= check). In the preface to the 2016 edition of his *Misused English Words and Expressions in EU Publications* Gardner also speculates on the possible influence of Euro-English on Standard English, citing *working group* as probably gaining currency in the UK, to the detriment of *working party*.

3 Reported in *The Guardian*, February 22 2013. URL <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/feb/22/german-president-pleads-britain-stay-eu?INTCMP=SRCH> (2017-04-10).

4 According to *The Guardian*, April 24 2013. URL <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/apr/24/europa-english-official-language-eu?INTCMP=SRCH> (2017-04-10).

5 Reported in *The Irish Times*, June 28 2016. URL <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/european-commission-rejects-claims-english-will-not-be-eu-language-1.2702734> (2017-06-30).

Mostly, however, ELF in Europe is the default contact language used by Europeans when travelling, as tourists, for business, or on mobility programmes in an educational context. It serves a short term need; anyone transferring permanently to another country in Europe would do well to learn the language spoken there. Today, it is the norm for tourists in any country in Europe (and possibly elsewhere) to address a shopkeeper, or just a passerby for directions, in English, without any preamble such as “Do you speak English?”; and they are likely to be understood. Similarly, any self-respecting tourist destination is likely to offer notices, advertisements, signs and warnings, in English as well as the local language. Graffiti in ELF is part of the urban scenery of Europe, too, the language of pop art, protest, and messages of unrequited love, offered to the world in the lingua franca, often with non-native spellings or inflections, which may make them more memorable. “Regina still miss iù” reads a long-surviving scrawl on an overpass at the beginning of the causeway from the Italian mainland to Venice; “We don’t going back” proclaimed a banner wielded by economic migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa who set up camp on a beach in the south of France in 2016.

But the use of ELF in Europe runs deeper than superficial contact and slogans; the twin motors behind ELF in Europe are education policies and the Internet. A great deal of ELF communication takes place off the streets, online, in blogs, chatrooms and using social media where the distinction between oral and written codes is blurred, as is frequently the identity, and also the native language, of the interlocutor. This phenomenon, with its implicit user/learner paradigm, is discussed in detail in Vettorel (2014). For Mauranen (2012, 33), it is the Internet which is co-responsible for the “explosive expansion” of English in the mid nineties, and the contamination between native and non-native users is likely to shape the English of the future: if today’s users are the first generation, “by the time the third generation learns English, we may expect English already to show clear traces of lingua franca influence”.

5.4 ELF in Schools

Implicit in early criticism of the ELF movement was the suspicion that there was a pedagogical agenda dictating the research, and that a road map was being laid out for language planners, syllabus designers, and publishers. After all, since one of the aims of any education system must be for its pupils to be able to communicate successfully with the outside world, setting the world’s lingua franca firmly in place as a teaching objective would seem to make sense. But as we have seen, ELF is not a describable variety which can be taught, or learnt, and ELF research would consequently be better seen by language planners as providing insights into the nature of non-na-

tive speaker interaction in English, and informing decisions about language teaching, rather than outlining a syllabus of simplified English. The priority for teachers, and students, should be to become “ELF aware”, rather than to “teach” or “learn” ELF (Sifakis 2014, Sifakis and Tsantila forthcoming, Sifakis 2017). This may mean teachers taking a different approach in the classroom than they would when teaching other foreign languages.

The special role of English in educational systems in Europe is evident in the sheer number of pupils learning the language. Many EU countries now have nearly 100% of pupils in the primary sector learning English, and by 2014 there was an average of 94% of *all* secondary school pupils in the EU studying English.⁶ The nearest rivals (French, 23%, Spanish and German both with 19%) are clearly in a different league. The significance is, or should be, clear: English is learnt ‘for a different reason’ from other languages. The European Commission, however, has been slow to recognize this. From its beginnings, the EU has promoted the learning of member state languages, to enable citizens to move, work and study freely in the Union. This policy had settled down, by the turn of the century, to a “mother tongue plus two” mantra; in 2002, the Barcelona meeting of the EU Council recommended that children should start learning two foreign languages from an early age. As recently as 2008 a five page document entitled *Council Resolution on a European Strategy for Multilingualism*⁷ sets out the rationale for schools to promote multi-lingualism in schools, to include subject learning in secondary schools through the use of a foreign language, known as CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), but makes no mention of the role of English as a lingua franca.

Behind the EU’s policy of fostering multilingualism lay the twin objectives of safeguarding minority languages and promoting multiculturalism. As the Union grew, so too did the challenges posed by these objectives, as the number of languages brought in by new member states also grew. But at the same time, Europe was having to come to grips with an unprecedented and vast influx of asylum seekers and economic migrants. Over the last two decades Italy has found itself in the front line of a wave of immigrants arriving from Asia, the middle East, and Africa, bringing with them a wide range of lingua-cultural systems. At the time of writing this wave shows no sign of abating. It has led to a further dimension for ELF in Europe, as a contact language between Europeans and non-Europeans, the traumatic and unequal encounters of which have been described in detail by Guido (2008, 2012).

6 http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Foreign_language_learning_statistics (2017-11-02).

7 [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32008G1216\(01\)&from=EN](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32008G1216(01)&from=EN) (2017-11-02).

Over time, the children of non-European immigrants have swelled the ranks of Italian classrooms, reaching the current figure of 10%⁸ of all enrolled pupils, with the largest number (around 35% of the total of 815,000 foreign pupils) in the primary sector. In areas of high density immigration, however, the percentage of immigrant pupils in primary classes is much higher, frequently exceeding the 30% limit imposed by the ministry in 2010.⁹ This has of course posed challenges to teachers, since children need to be integrated into society, and this can only be done through the acquisition of Italian as a second language. However, many would-be immigrants come from Anglophone areas, such as West Africa, and the Indian subcontinent, where new Englishes have flourished since independence, and for whom English is the language of choice in international interaction. Older children, who have attended school in their country of origin, may well have been used to English as a medium of instruction, or exposed frequently to a variety, or varieties, of ‘postcolonial’ English.

This means that in many multicultural classrooms English, or rather, a potential context for ELF, is a latent linguistic resource waiting to be put to good use by teachers working towards cross-cultural understanding, a platform for integration for immigrant children, and the opportunity for real foreign language use for Italian children almost all of whom, as we noted above, are learning English. In each case, English has to be reinvented by participants on the basis of the limitations, and potential, of their own, and their interlocutors’, competences.

This scenario has been described by Lopriore (2015) reporting a longitudinal study of primary school language learning in Europe.¹⁰ She notes that the phenomenon (of migrant children in primary language classes) “has partly contributed to affect the type of second language learning and acquisition processes young learners undergo since migrant children, when at school, are exposed to and use more than one language to learn and we may hypothesize that elements of ELF begin to emerge” (161). The fact that teachers are themselves non-native users of English, she suggests, adds a further resource to the effort of co-constructing meaning in a polylingual class of young learners.

At secondary school level many young Europeans, as we saw in the Eurobarometer survey quoted above, consider themselves to be competent users of English. In Italy, a level of B1 on the CEFR (the first level of the “independent user” bracket, originally known as “threshold level”) is the target set for age 16, at the end of the two year *biennio* cycle at the beginning of the secondary school, and by this age many pupils will be using

8 http://www.istruzione.it/allegati/2016/Rapporto-Miur-Ismu-2014_15.pdf (2017-04-05).

9 Ministry of Education (MIUR) circular no. 2, 2017-01-08.

10 ELLiE, (Early Language Learning in Europe).

the language outside school, on the Internet, on holiday, or on school trips and exchanges. They are exposed to more English, and more non-native English, than any previous generation, and this fact may, paradoxically, be seen as a problem by some teachers rooted in native speaker standards. There is no shortage of research showing that teachers feel the need to base their teaching on a standard model, even if they are well aware of the existence and importance of ELF (Groom 2012, Vettorel 2015, Soruc 2015), but young learners know from experience that native speaker standards (or rather, the standard grammar of EFL textbooks) are not needed for successful international communication.

Potentially, this might seem like a recipe for confrontation in the classroom, but it can also be harnessed by teachers as a source of reflection on language variety, the nature of a lingua franca, and the relationship between accuracy and communicative efficiency. One of the more interesting challenges facing English language teachers in secondary schools is to open their classrooms to the reality of ELF, for example through twinnings or projects shared with international partners, which may involve real time communication through the Internet at school, but which students could continue in their own time and space. Grazzi (2015) describes one such project from the perspective of developing intercultural communicative competence.

5.5 ELF in Higher Education

It is however in higher education, in Italy, as elsewhere in Europe, that the speed of change in the spread of ELF has been most apparent. Unlike the evolution of ELF in schools, it has been a top-down process, willfully imposed by the governing bodies of universities as part of a strategy of internationalization. The impetus for internationalization is largely due to the 1999 Bologna process, which created the premises for the recognition of degrees across Europe through the credit transfer system (ECTS) and the adoption of a two level degree programme, to include a three year first level degree, followed by a one or two year second level degree (which together replaced the old four year *laurea* in Italy). One of the main objectives was to promote student and teacher mobility, but the Bologna process opened up a number of other important possibilities, such as the recognition of diplomas by prospective employers, and a more competitive stance to attract international students, which until the turn of the century had been largely the prerogative of the US and the UK.

In the new 'internationalised' European university English has two main functions: as a medium of instruction (EMI) and as a lingua franca in everyday campus life in international encounters. English is the language of choice as the teaching language (or 'medium of instruction') in most in-

ternational universities, or universities which have pretensions to being 'international', and there is a long tradition of English medium universities in non-native English countries across the world. In Europe, Holland was the trailblazer, and Italy a comparative late starter. But over the last ten years, the number of foreign students enrolling in Italian universities has more than doubled, and although the national percentage (around 4%)¹¹ is still low compared to Germany or France,¹² it continues to grow rapidly, while some of the more prestigious universities in the north of the country, such as the Polytechnics of Milan and Turin (20%) and the Bocconi University in Milan (15%), have much higher percentages. Many of these international students will have chosen the university because they offer courses in English in their chosen disciplines. There are currently 276 degree courses offered in English in 54 Italian universities,¹³ over 90% of which are at master's level.

The international dimension of a university is completed by students, academics, and administrative staff on mobility. Every year around 20,000 European students choose Italy as their destination on the Erasmus programme, and many of them will expect to follow courses in English. They will also expect to communicate with their peers, and their teachers, in English. Thus local students, even those who do not attend EMI courses, or go on mobility themselves, may frequently find themselves having to interact with foreign students, or to listen to a visiting academic, in English.

In 2010 a needs analysis carried out among final year students from all four faculties at the university of Ca' Foscari Venice¹⁴ (Newbold 2012a) found that most students had needed English for research purposes, online or in books and articles; while sizeable minorities had also had to write e-mails, attend seminars or one-off lectures, or interact with foreign students as part of their everyday lives at the university (see tab. 1 below). Nearly a decade later, these figures are likely to be much higher. At the time, they gave support to the decision which had recently been taken by the University to require an entrance level of B1 English for all incoming students, irrespective of the course they were enrolling for; a requirement made by most Italian universities at the same time.

Table 4. Needs analysis of final year undergraduate students at the University of Venice: percentage of students per activity.

11 <http://www.rivistauniversitas.it/Articoli.aspx?IDC=2986> (2017-04-25).

12 But most foreign students will be following courses delivered in French.

13 http://www.universitaly.it/index.php/cercacorsi/universita?lingua_corso=en (2017-04-25).

14 Economics, Languages, Humanities, and Science.

What have you needed English for during your time as a student?

Reading textbooks & articles.	70%
Using internet for research.	53%
Watching film and video.	23%
Participation seminars in English.	21%
Writing emails.	19%
Interaction with foreign students.	18%
Interaction with foreign lecturers.	9%
Writing letters.	2%

More recently, the University has ratcheted up the entrance requirements, so that all incoming students for second level degree courses (*lauree magistrali*) now have to produce evidence of a B2 level in English. At the same time, it has widened the net of courses delivered in English to include first degree courses, with a 3 year BA (*laurea triennale*) in Philosophy, International Studies and Economics being introduced in 2015.

Another indicator of the process of internationalization is to be found in the care taken in the development of English language versions of university websites. All Italian universities with an international vocation offer links to an English version on their home page, the main function of which seems to be the marketing of courses to prospective new students, as well as to respond to a need to provide information about the university to students on mobility. In recent years they have become more sophisticated, to include well-made video testimonials of international students. Jenkins (2014), in her study of *English as a Lingua Franca in International University*, devotes a chapter to university websites, and notes a preference for native speaker norms, as well as, in Europe, remnants of a diffidence and opposition to EMI entrenched in an orthodox European philosophy of multilingualism. She quotes, in particular, the episode of the Polytechnic of Milan which had just announced (in spring 2014) that all of its courses would in future be held in English, causing an uproar among academic staff (many of whom felt they would not be have the competence to deliver their courses in English) and subsequent legal action. This led to a court ruling that the move was unconstitutional, followed by a rectification from the Constitutional Court that universities could exercise autonomy in their choice of language, so long as the national language (Italian) was “not completely sacrificed”.¹⁵

The Milan uprising, however, was atypical, a consequence of the sudden and drastic changes which the University management was attempting to

¹⁵ Reported in *La Repubblica*, February 24 2017. URL http://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2017/02/24/news/corsi_in_inglese_al_politecnico_via_libera_della_consulta_purche_non_sacrifichi_totalmente_l_italiano_-159117927/ (2017-04-21).

implement. Three years on, the website shows that the majority of undergraduate courses continue to be delivered in Italian, while most second level courses are in English. At the same time, decisions taken elsewhere in Europe seem to signal that the rise of ELF in academic is unstoppable. In 2013 an EU commission found that knowledge of English was a necessary prerequisite in European higher education. With this recommendation, the EU was breaking new ground by naming the unnameable, by recognizing that English is a pre-requisite for intra-institutional communication in Europe:

Higher education institutions should develop and implement holistic internationalisation strategies as an integral part of their overall mission and functions. Increased mobility of students and staff, international dimension of curricula, international experience of faculty, *with a sufficient command of English* and a second foreign language and intercultural competences, transnational delivery of courses and degrees, and international alliances should become indispensable components of higher education in Europe and beyond.¹⁶

The appeal for plurilingualism is still there, but it is in second place, as “a second foreign language”. In the same year, France introduced legislation to make it possible to use a language other than French as the medium of instruction in state universities, opening the floodgates to EMI in a country which has a history of legislating against the use of English in public life.¹⁷

5.6 ELFA: English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings

English as an academic lingua franca (or ELFA, as it has come to be known) functions, as it does in a non-academic context, as a complex second-order language contact between similects (Mauranen 2015, 38). But since it also involves contact between members of a community of practice – albeit a very large one – it seems reasonable to assume that it might exhibit, or develop, traits which are characteristic of that community. This was the research question behind the establishment in 2008 of the 1m word ELFA corpus at the University of Helsinki, which has recently been flanked by the 1.5m word WeELFA corpus of written academic English at the same

¹⁶ Recommendation 12 made by the High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education. URL http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-554_en.htm?locale=en (2012-04-21) (italics added).

¹⁷ The 1994 *loi Toubon* outlawed the use of English in public documents, advertising and university lectures, and introduced quotas for the number of foreign language songs which could be broadcast by public media.

university.¹⁸ The spoken corpus contains both monologic samples (extracts from lectures given by NNS) and dialogic samples, such as seminars and conference discussions, across a range of disciplines. The written corpus includes research blogs, unedited research papers, and examiner reports. It does not include published materials, even if at least 80 per cent of the world's peer-reviewed academic articles are now published in English.¹⁹ The reason for this is that many published articles are edited by mother tongue proof readers. Some publishers make it a contractual requirement of their authors to have their work edited in this way, with the result that many publications are hybrid co-constructions which might display native-like features (such as sentence-level formal accuracy) but also non-native features in their higher level rhetorical organization. This is especially true for publications in the humanities, but is probably less so for scientific publications which adhere to a more rigid framework.

Unsurprisingly, the corpora show features of lexical simplification, lexical creation, redundancy reduction and creation, and the regularization of irregular verbs, all of which are attested in other corpora. At the same time, Mauranen (2015) shows a fairly close match between the most common three word phrases in the ELFA corpus and a corresponding native corpus of academic English (MICASE²⁰). Given the comparatively formal nature of academic discourse, a notable feature of the ELFA corpus turns out to be high productivity in morphological manipulation, yielding examples like *intrevent*, *introduced*, *addictation*, *devaluaized*. Uncountable or mass nouns, often conveying abstract notions, which are a stock-in-trade of academic reporting, frequently crop up in plural forms (*advices*, *informations*, *evidences*), often fulfilling a communicative need as they do so – *evidences*, for example, may be used to indicate more than one source of evidence, whereas the monolithic, uncountable form *evidence* cannot do this. A native speaker, constrained by the one-form-only of the mass noun, would need to think hard to convey the idea of “more than one incidence of evidence”. The corpus also throws up examples of what can be seen as the quintessential ELFA verb, *to discuss about*. This non-standard form, derived from analogy with *talk/speak about*, has slipped into international conferences everywhere, with Mauranen claiming that it is also attested in native speaker English (Mauranen 2015, 40).

Academic ELF also exists in the grey area of the Internet, sharing some of the features of both spoken and written codes, in e-mails, blogs, calls for papers, and abstracts. Depending on a number of factors, such as

18 For an overview of the project see <http://www.helsinki.fi/elfa> (2017-10-27).

19 <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2015/08/english-universal-language-science-research/400919/> (2017-04-21).

20 Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English.

time constraints, but also, perhaps, a growing sense of awareness of ELF and a shared tolerance level within the community, non-standard forms are rife. Here are just three of the more interesting forms the author has come across in personal email communications over the last two weeks:

ex 1

From a conference abstract:

Weeping, mourning, praying, crying out were parts of a behavioural pattern, a visible, **hearable**, and ritualized performance taking place in private houses, streets and public spaces.

ex 2

From a call for papers for an international conference:

This is a **gentleman reminder** about the call for abstracts for the next [...] conference.

ex 3

Message from the same organizing committee as Ex 2:

We have a serious problem with the abstract submission system. The webmaster **tries** to solve this problem.

Whether one considers these as 'errors' or simply examples of ELF depends of course on one's perspective as a reader. Most intended readers of this kind of email communication are unlikely to spend much time lamenting the lack of formal correctness, since rapidity of communication and communicative effectiveness are the writers' aims. From a teaching/learning perspective, *hearable* should have been corrected to *audible*, *gentleman* to *gentle* and the progressive form *is trying* is required in Example 3. But from an ELF perspective, *hearable* is an easily understood example of lexical creativity, while *gentleman* may come from an analogy with the expression *gentleman's agreement*, rather than the NS collocation *gentle reminder*, giving an extra layer of genteelness to the expression. Only with the choice of aspect for the verb (simple instead of progressive) does there appear to be a net loss rather than gain: the present simple has kicked in as a default all-purpose present tense. However, there is no loss of intelligibility. Moreover, the language context in which all three non standard forms find themselves suggests that the writers are competent users of English.

The dictates of real time communication may lead to unchecked errors

for native speakers, too, such as when the phonological dimension of a word or phrase interferes with the written form, further blurring the distinction between NS and NNS, as in the following examples:

ex 4

Secondly I will describe the Australian English (AusE) from a general **point of you**.

ex 5

We plan to get the work done in September (I need to check if this is possible) with a **few** to an event before [.....] leaves.

Curiously, in both examples, it is the same word, *view*, which has failed to materialize. The curiosity is compounded by the fact that the first has been written by a NNS student, the second by a NS member of faculty.

We have already mentioned the attention given to English by European university websites. When we take a closer look at the University of Venice website we find that this extends to punning and other kinds of wordplay, suggesting, perhaps, that the academic community is in control of English as a creative resource for international communication. Before accessing the English language version, on the main Italian pages, we find the titles of lectures and seminars in English and projects and messages to students wilfully code-switching and punning:

ex 6

A production at the university theatre:

Friendly Feuer - una polifonia europea.

ex 7

An introduction to archeology:

Welcome to the Dig! Strategie e nuove professioni per un'archeologia pubblica

ex 8

A presentation of second level degree courses:

Lauree magistrali: **postgraduate opportunities**

ex 9

An invitation to participate in a sponsored run:

Y.our Future Run

These examples, downloaded on the same day,²¹ give an idea of the extent to which the Italian user of the website, within a context of Italian, before engaging with ELF and the international community, is exposed to English. Whereas examples 6-8 are best seen as instances of translanguaging – the conscious exploitation of shared language resources (Garcia and Wei 2014) – example 9 is more complex. Presumably the intention is to indicate that ‘your’ future (referring to potential sponsors) is also ‘our’ future (referring to the university). It is hard to imagine this kind of word manipulation to be successful in a native speaker context, perhaps because of the phonological clash between ‘your’ and ‘our’, but it is increasingly common in an international environment.

The final dimension of academic ELF is of course, published research. The ‘finished product’ nature of academic publications, and the need for clarity and lack of ambiguity, means that publications continue to be the object of standards-based scrutiny, and that articles in most important international journals display little variation from native speaker texts. Indeed, attention to the structure of academic texts in English has had a huge boost from the work of, among others, Swales (1990), Swales and Feak (2004), and Hyland (2003, 2015), and has led to the development of courses in writing “English for academic purposes”, on line and in timetabled classes, in universities everywhere, and a healthy branch in the ELT publishing market. For the moment, then, native speaker English provides a norm, and only a few publications²² specify that they do *not* require a native speaker editing process.

This component of “academic ELF” – arguably the most important – is the one which, as we have seen, lies furthest from the typical ELF construct of a dynamic and on-going co-construction of meaning, and has attracted least attention from ELF researchers. However, the sheer volume of published research, not to mention the increased pressure on any self-respecting journal to require two peer reviewers of each article, means that a ‘native speaker control’ or ‘near native speaker’ control of all material now being published is simply not possible, and it is legitimate to suppose that here, too, over time, native speaker norms may begin to be superseded by the more fluid strategies of transmitting knowledge which are the stock-in-trade of competent second language users.

21 2017-04-25.

22 The *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca* is one of these.

5.7 ELF, EMI and the Role of Certification: Towards a Rationale

In this chapter we have examined the phenomenal rise of English as a lingua franca, and as a medium of instruction, in European and especially Italian universities. We have seen that it has multiple facets which impinge on 'stay at home' students just as they do on students and teachers on mobility. We have also noted that the phenomenon permeates spoken interaction, email communication, and university websites, and may contribute to shape academic publishing in the future.

For the student, therefore, success at university is at least to some measure dependent on a range of strategic competences in English, which will be needed for research, for interacting with other students, for attending lectures given by visiting academics, and even for browsing their own university website. It is hardly surprising, then, that universities, mindful of the disastrous drop-out rates of the past, which in Italy at least were attenuated after the 2000 reform, have sought to offset this danger by setting entrance level requirements, usually B1 (for a first level degree course) and, increasingly, B2, to access second level or PhD courses, since at this level students may well be required to make academic presentations in English.

But what kind of tests are being used to assess these competences, which, besides 'traditional' skills such as reading comprehension include the pragmatic competences needed for oral interaction between NNS as well as a range of digital literacies? Universities usually give incoming students a choice: to provide a recognized certification, such as those we discussed in chapters 2 and 3, or to do an in-house test. The latter tends to be an objective, computer-delivered test which is easy and (comparatively) cheap to administer, although it requires universities to have large numbers of PCs available at the same time for multiple delivery of tests. This kind of test is also reliable, but it is likely to be limited in scope, and may be confined to testing formal accuracy of de-contextualised grammar and vocabulary items. A more complete test will include listening, and a more integrated and appropriate test (perhaps at B2 level) might include the productive skills of speaking and writing – but at a cost, to the university (or to the student).

Most in-house tests are rigorously native-speaker norm based; typically, they require test-takers to choose between 'correct' and 'incorrect' forms, encouraging, or reinforcing, a behaviour which has only limited use in real ELF interaction. There is no guarantee that a high scorer on such a test will be an effective ELF user; vice versa, a low performer may turn out to have good communicative skills when speaking to contemporaries from other countries.

Certification may provide a more streamlined passport to the university, but it has a cost. At present, not more than twenty percent of enrolling

students are likely to have an acceptable certification.²³ In addition, as we saw at the end of chapter 2, in spite of claims made by boards such as IELTS and TOEFL as to the international nature of their certification, this is primarily intended for non-native speakers who intend to study in a native speaker environment, where there will be a premium on formal accuracy, and where native speakers may not be willing, or able, to make too many concessions to foreigners. But in Europe, where English has a different role, where participants find themselves on an equal footing as partners in communication, where English is a vehicle for information exchange rather than a transmitter of culture and cultural values, a qualitatively different approach to assessment seems to be needed. In the final chapter of this book we will attempt to articulate the rationale for a more 'ELF friendly' certification, and look at the form such a certification might take. But first we shall return to the co-certification and its revised (2016) version which, for the first time, we believe, led to the incorporation of an ELF element into a construct for an international exam in English.

23 Based on data from the Centro Linguistico di Ateneo, Ca' Foscari University of Venice.