Taking Stance in English as a Lingua Franca

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Managing Interpersonal Relations in Academic Lectures

By

Maicol Formentelli

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To mum and dad
with gratitude and love

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List of Abbreviations

ACE	Asian Corpus of English
BASE	British Academic Spoken English
CLIL	Content and Language Integrated Learning
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EIL	English as an International Language
ELF	English as a Lingua Franca
ELFA	English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings
EMI	English as Medium of Instruction
ENL	English as a Native Language
ETP	English-Taught Programme
ICE	International Corpus of English
ICLE	International Corpus of Learner English
ICLHE	Integrating Content and Language in Higher Education
LFC	Lingua Franca Core
LFE	Lingua Franca English
LINDSEI	Louvain International Database of Spoken English Interlanguage
MICASE	Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
VOICE	Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English

CHAPTER ONE

ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA AND THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Introduction

How many millions? This simple question on the statistics of English speakers in the world was asked in 1985 by one of the best-known experts of global English, David Crystal, in his provocative article inaugurating the first issue of the journal *English Today*. Back then, the author settled for one billion speakers, basing his estimates on the population figures of countries where English is spoken as a mother tongue, or first language (e.g. Australia, Canada, Great Britain, United States), and countries where English has official status and people speak it as a second language alongside local languages (e.g. India, Kenya, Nigeria, Singapore). Quite wisely Crystal warned about the tentativeness of his estimates due to the difficulties in finding effective criteria to define when a speaker of English should count as such outside the Inner Circle of native speakers. Those were the years in which the conceptualisation of World Englishes (Kachru 1992) was gathering momentum, paving the way for the description and legitimisation of emerging non-native varieties in postcolonial settings (i.e. the Outer Circle).

Almost 25 years later, in an updated article which appeared in the same journal, Crystal's estimates were revised upwards and the original question turned into a tepid guess: "Two thousand million?" (2008), including in the count potential speakers of English from the Expanding Circle (cf. Crystal 2003 for details on the statistics). While the exact figures continue to be very difficult to determine, two crucial facts are stated that are generally acknowledged nowadays, namely that English has become the global language of communication and that "the centre of gravity of the English language has moved from the native speaker to the non-native speaker" (Crystal 2008, 6), with the latter representing the great majority which is bound to increase in the future. Crystal's observations thus mark

a shift in the perspective on English and bring a truly global dimension into the debate.

The reasons for the widespread use of English as a global language are manifold and mainly connected with the historical imperialistic policy, political influence, and economic dominance of the United Kingdom and the United States of America (Crystal 2003), the major scientific discoveries and the technological advancement made in these countries, the dissemination of British and American cultural models through the media, the film industry, popular music, and electronic communication through the Internet (Crystal 2006), and the progressive use of English for international official documents to the detriment of other languages (Phillipson 2008). Some argue that the success of English may also be due to some of its structural features, like morphological simplicity and lexical flexibility (Mioni 2005, 171), even though there is no agreement on this point, as some scholars claim that learners of English are faced with all sorts of orthographic, phonological and grammatical difficulties as much as in other languages (cf. for example Jenkins 2015, 53-54).

Besides the importance of understanding the reasons of the worldwide diffusion of English, research is also concerned with the sociolinguistic consequences that English as an international language (EIL) has had and will have for the development of English itself and for international communication. A useful starting point is the distinction between 'localised EIL' and 'globalised EIL' (Seidlhofer 2011), which captures two very different actualisations and outcomes of the phenomenon.

Localised EIL refers to the international distribution of English to countries of the Outer Circle during the colonial period, in other words the abovementioned phenomenon of New Englishes. In these countries, English started to develop endonormatively and was gradually institutionalised through processes of nativisation and identification (Schneider 2003) into 'new' national varieties that are now commonly used intranationally and established internationally, like Indian English, Nigerian English, Singapore English, and so on. In this sense, EIL has acquired the local taste of specific nation-based speech communities and exhibits codified distinctive features associated with shared linguacultural norms.

Globalised EIL, on the other hand, refers to the language used in international settings like political and diplomatic meetings, business exchanges, conferences, and social gatherings involving people who speak different native languages and resort to English as a "convenient common means of communication" (Seidlhofer 2011, 4) or, to use an expression that has gained wide currency, English as a lingua franca (ELF).

The unprecedented spread of English as a global lingua franca and the fact that native speakers are statistically in a significant minority for language use call for a revision of the role of non-native speakers, who need not be necessarily regarded as English learners and deficient speakers of an interlanguage, but as competent language users and legitimate agents of language change (Brumfit 2001; Brutt-Griffler 2002). Participants in ELF speech events may come from all three of Kachru's circles and, unlike what usually happens in localised EIL contexts, do not orient to their local speech communities, but are continuously engaged in negotiation to establish common linguacultural ground with their interlocutors (Seidlhofer 2011).

These contexts of interaction are generally characterised by significant heterogeneity of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and a certain variability of proficiency in English among speakers who interact on a temporary basis rather than over extended periods of time. It follows that issues may arise related to communicative competence, mutual intelligibility, and the management of personal identities. Conversely, effective communicative strategies and innovative linguistic patterns may also be developed by speakers to respond to guarantee smooth and successful verbal exchanges in international communication.

The present volume aims to investigate some of the aspects related to the use of English as the language of internationalisation in higher education and the management of interpersonal relations in ELF university courses, with a focus on ELF classroom interaction. The core of the research explores in particular the linguistic strategies that lecturers who are non-native speakers of English exploit to encode formality, power, social distance and respect while teaching to an international audience of non-native speakers of English, with a view to identifying recurrent linguistic patterns of interpersonal stance that may surface as a response to the communicative needs of this specific type of interaction.

Tertiary education is a privileged domain for the investigation of the mechanisms of ELF communication, since internationalisation is one of the keywords of contemporary university systems (Huang et al. 2014). The academia is characterised by dense international networks of researchers who collaborate on joint projects and regularly exchange knowledge, and has elected English as the main working language for the circulation of ideas and the dissemination of scientific findings both in conferences and workshops, and in publications in periodicals and reviews (Graddol 1997, 8-9). At the end of the 20th century, international publications in English increased by up to more than 80% in social sciences and humanities, and reached 90% in natural sciences (Hamel 2007). On a more local level, in

some countries the use of English in scientific articles is implicitly encouraged as a by-product of national research evaluation programmes (Gazzola 2012). In addition, the last two decades have seen the process of internationalisation increasing in European tertiary education through students' and staff mobility, thanks to the implementation of exchange programmes (e.g. the Lifelong Learning Programme and the Erasmus+ programme funded by the European Commission) and the gradual introduction of courses taught entirely in English alongside traditional tuition in the national language. Coleman (2006) argues that the process of internationalisation of European universities is closely related to the general spread of ELF in the world and the increasing adoption of English as the medium of instruction. Indeed, English is gaining considerable importance in academic courses, not only because it enhances the prestige of the hosting institution nationally and internationally, but also because proficiency in this language undoubtedly adds value to one's personal educational training and constitutes an asset in the international job market.

ELF and EMI programmes in higher education

The spread of English as a global language and the internationalisation of universities through English-mediated instruction are often considered two inextricably intertwined processes (Kirkpatrick 2011). According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), student mobility at tertiary level has grown dramatically over the last ten years with an increase of 50% of international and foreign students enrolled worldwide from 2005 and 2012 (OECD 2016). Among the preferred destinations, the largest shares are taken by English-speaking countries like the United States (26%), the United Kingdom (15%) and Australia (8%), but also non-Anglophone countries, especially in mainland Europe, play a substantial role in the international education market, with France and Germany at the top of the list with 11% and 10% of all international students respectively (OECD 2016, 331). The OECD report argues that non-English-speaking institutions in Europe have become more and more attractive and competitive thanks to the offer of tertiary education programmes partially or entirely taught in English, known as English as medium of instruction (EMI) programmes. This trend seems to confirm Coleman's (2006, 11) prediction that "English, in some form, will definitely become the language of higher education". Of interest with regard to these statistics is the datum on the countries of origin of students attending master's and doctorate courses abroad. Most of the international

students enrolled in EMI courses in Anglophone and non-Anglophone countries come from countries where English is not spoken as a native language (OECD 2016, 343), thus making postgraduate education an ELF context of socialisation (Jenkins 2014).

When it comes to ELF in higher education, the expression EMI is commonly used nowadays, but while both ELF and EMI share the fact that English is used as the vehicular language, their meanings do not fully coincide. One macroscopic difference resides in the contexts of interaction in which the expressions can be used. The term ELF has a more general scope and covers exchanges that can take place in practically every domain of human interaction, from a business telephone call to email correspondence between international companies, from small-talk conversations among friends in a bar to brief exchanges of information between a tourist and the receptionist of a visitor centre. The use of EMI, on the other hand, is specific to education at university level and is only employed with reference to that context of interaction. Even within the academic domain there is a clear difference in scope, as ELF may refer to the use of English in the classroom, in international conferences, in publications in scientific journals, among scientists working in a laboratory, in a thesis defence in front of the examination board and many other situations, while EMI refers solely to teaching-learning activities, including the organisation of the curriculum, lesson delivery, assessments and examinations.

Some differences also emerge when comparing the composition of ELF exchanges and EMI programmes in terms of participants' linguacultural backgrounds. ELF situations are usually highly multicultural and interactants speak various mother tongues alongside English, which is by default the lingua franca of communication. EMI courses, on the contrary, do not necessarily involve teachers and students from different linguistic backgrounds, but are often implemented in classrooms only featuring speakers of the same L1 (Knapp 2011, 55), or a large majority of L1 speakers of the language of the hosting country (see for example Doiz et al. 2013a).

Another substantial difference pertains to the aspects that are focussed on in the studies that employ one or the other expression. Among the aims of ELF research are the understanding and description of how English is used by participants in lingua franca exchanges, how linguistic forms and functions are negotiated, appropriated, locally created and recreated to achieve successful communication, how individuals' multilingual repertoire surfaces in their use of English (cf. below). The primary focus of the recent literature on EMI, on the other hand, is on the policies

underlying the organisation of English mediated tuition at university, the pedagogical issues and methodological implications related to the implementation of these programmes, the quality and effectiveness of teaching in a foreign language, and the impact that EMI may have on national languages and minority languages in terms of L1 domain loss (see for instance the contributions in Dimova et al. 2015; Doiz et al. 2013b; Haberland and Mortensen 2012).

There is wide agreement in describing EMI programmes as a top-down process primarily driven by economic, social and political forces in response to the increasing competitiveness between universities and the growing prominence of international rankings (Jenkins 2014; Wilkinson 2013). As a matter of fact, among the main reasons for the introduction of EMI programmes are to recruit fee-paying international students, to enhance the institutional profile so as to attract research funding, to prepare students to compete on the global market, and to foster student mobility (cf. Hellkjaer and Westergaard 2003; Maiworm and Wächter 2002; Wächter and Maiworm 2008).

Finally, another aspect of EMI programmes that has recently been explored which is not directly addressed in ELF research is the simultaneous teaching and learning of content and language in English-mediated courses. This approach, known as Integrating Content and Language in Higher Education (ICLHE), follows the rationale of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) courses already established at primary and secondary levels of education in most European countries, which conceive the transfer of content-based information and the promotion of foreign language learning as two equally important goals. Numerous studies have demonstrated the efficacy of CLIL programmes in strengthening students' motivation and fostering the improvement of their language competencies (cf. among others Coyle et al. 2010; Mehisto et al. 2008).

At tertiary level the situation is slightly different, as ICLHE is a newer phenomenon and less structured than CLIL implemented in primary and secondary schools. It is often the case that most lecturers engaged in EMI teaching are not given specific methodological or linguistic training (Costa 2016; Dafouz Milne 2011; Fortanet-Gómez 2010). Another difficulty in the implementation of EMI courses may be found in the insufficient English language competence of both lecturers and students (Costa 2016). Moreover, many lecturers see themselves as teachers of the discipline rather than foreign language teachers (Ariey 2012; Costa 2013). Yet, in a recent empirical study investigating six lectures in three Italian universities, Costa (2012a) has shown that content lecturers *do* make use

of input presentation strategies typical of the CLIL approach, such as pre-emptive lexical and grammatical focus on form (examples, definitions, paraphrases, repetitions, synonyms), input enhancement (mainly typographical), code-switching (into the L1 of the majority of students), and humour, which make the input more noticeable and comprehensible (Krashen 1985) and favour learning of both content and language.

In light of these terminological clarifications, the teaching activities and the participants engaged in classroom interaction in the EMI course under investigation in this volume will be referred to as ELF academic lectures and ELF speakers (lecturers and students) respectively, because of the highly multicultural and multilingual environment (see chapter three). Moreover, the acquisitional side of EMI courses that is of interest in the ICLHE approach will not be taken into consideration here, even though some of the input presentation strategies are also likely to occur in the data analysed and discussed in the present research, since the focus of the research is on other aspects of ELF interaction that pertain to the management of interpersonal relationships and the expression of interpersonal stance in terms of formality, power, social distance and respect.

EMI programmes across Europe and in Italy

To understand the impact that ELF may have on European higher education, it seems important to give a general overview of the spread of EMI programmes in Europe and in Italy in particular, which is the country which this research is focussed on. In a recent survey involving more than 2,600 higher education institutions from 28 European countries,[1] Wächter and Maiworm (2014) have tried to provide a comprehensive picture of the number of English-taught programmes (ETPs)[2] and the proportion of these programmes in the entire teaching process carried out in the local languages of the individual countries. The authors have identified more than 8,000 ETPs in Europe, which are offered by one out of four (27%) of the institutions contacted in the survey. The average proportion of ETPs against programmes taught in the local languages is almost 6% and only

[1] The sample of countries include the members of the European Union, the countries of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and Turkey. The UK, Ireland, Malta, Luxembourg and Lichtenstein are excluded either because English is the standard medium of instruction in those countries or because of their size.

[2] With the label ETPs the authors refer to full degree programmes carried out at Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate level. The term ETPs can therefore be considered a synonym of EMI programmes.

1.3% of students are enrolled in these courses. Even though the proportion of ETPs and students may seem rather low, if the total number of ETPs offered in 2014 is compared with the number of ETPs recorded by the same authors in a similar survey in 2007, namely 2,389 (Wächter and Maiworm 2008), it gives an idea of the dramatic increase of these types of programmes in the recent past. In only seven years the number of ETPs in Europe has more than tripled in size, with a growth of 239% in percentage terms.

What also emerges from Wächter and Maiworm's survey is the uneven distribution of ETPs across Europe. The Nordic countries are the leaders by far in EMI programmes in Europe with an average value of 61% of institutions offering ETPs, a proportion of 20% of courses fully taught in English and 5% of student enrolment. Countries from central-western Europe and the Baltic region follow with respectively 44.5% and 38.7% of institutions engaged in EMI programmes, which constitute 10% of all courses and attract about 2% of the totality of students. Much lower figures are found in the countries of central-eastern Europe and southern Europe, where the percentages of ETPs range between 17% and 20% and the proportion of courses drop to 5% (central-eastern Europe) and 2% (southern Europe), with an enrolment rate of only 0.5% to 1% of students.[3] These percentages suggest that a sharp divide between central-northern Europe and southern Europe exists in terms of English competence and use, and corroborate the findings released in 2012 by the European Commission in the Special Eurobarometer 386 devoted to Europeans and their linguistic skills. Delving further into the data, however, a significant result stands out related to the countries of south-west Europe (i.e. France, Italy, Portugal and Spain), which show a particularly high growth rate of EMI programmes from 2007 and 2014 (866% vs. the average growth rate of 237%) as a sign of the efforts being made to improve the situation.

Italy, ranked 20th in Wächter and Maiworm's (2014) survey, is one of the European states where EMI programmes have only been introduced in recent years, although the country hosts many of the oldest universities in the world and has a tradition of academic teaching that covers almost a millennium (cf. de Ridder-Symoens 1992). The first large-scale survey to map ETPs in Italy was carried out in 2010 (Costa and Coleman 2010, 2013) and involved 76 Italian universities (14 private and 62 public institutions). A questionnaire was sent to various referents within each institution and aimed at gathering detailed information on the organisation

[3] Cyprus constitutes an exception among southern European countries with percentages of ETPs and student enrolment that approximate those found in the Nordic countries.

of EMI courses, teachers' profile and teaching style, and students' profile (see Costa and Coleman 2013, 8-9 for details on methodology). The results show that English-taught courses and programmes are offered in the majority (74%) of universities that returned the questionnaire,[4] with a slightly higher rate in private universities, which are generally wealthier and more likely to take part in international networks. ETPs are numerous especially in institutions in the north (90%) and the centre of Italy (87.5%), whereas universities in the south lag far behind (22%), suggesting that internationalisation is much slower in southern regions. As for the level of ETPs, Master's degrees and doctorates are mostly reported, while English-taught courses at Bachelor's level are rarer.

Some of Costa and Coleman's findings on the number and the national distribution of ETPs are confirmed in two reports by the Conference of Italian University Rectors (CRUI) based on data from the academic year 2011-2012 (cf. Campagna and Pulcini 2014) and 2016-2017 (Carfagna and Cavallini 2016), which also show a steady increase in the number of EMI programmes and of universities engaged in the internationalisation of courses. Among the disciplinary areas involved in international courses in 2016-2017, the top position is held by Economics and Statistics (121 out of 682 courses, 18%), closely followed by Industrial Engineering and Information Technology (109 courses, 16%), Medicine (68 courses, 10%), Political and Social Sciences (56 courses, 8%), and Civil Engineering and Architecture (53 courses, 8%). The disciplines in the area of the Humanities and in the field of Law offer very few Master's and PhD courses in English, possibly due to the linguistic and cultural specificities of the subjects, but are still very active in the organisation of international winter and summer schools.

These figures testify to the growing attention of Italian universities to the challenges posed by the internationalisation of higher education and the need of English-taught programmes to compete on the European and global market. Universities seem to agree that EMI programmes will bring benefits to the parties involved in the process, as they help to improve the international profile of the institution, to attract foreign students, and to better prepare Italian students for the global market by improving language proficiency and promoting interculturality (Costa 2016). At the same time, however, a heated debate is taking place among scholars, intellectuals and the general public regarding the risks of the rapid and uncontrolled spread of English to the detriment of Italian, which might undermine the quality

[4] Only 50% of universities participated in the survey, many of which from the North of Italy.

of research and teaching, and the prestige of Italian as an academic language, especially if the implementation of EMI programmes is not supported by carefully thought out language policies (Maraschio and De Martino 2013; Molino and Campagna 2014; Pulcini and Campagna 2015). Let us now step back from the state of affairs of EMI programmes in Italy and the issues related to the internationalisation of Italian universities to take a closer look at the recently established research paradigm of ELF, with a review of some of the main studies that have marked the rapid growth of this field of investigation.

From 'lingua franca' to ELF

English as a lingua franca is a common expression often employed by professional linguists and the general public to designate the use of English as a vehicular language in interactions involving participants from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The term 'lingua franca' originated in the XII-XIII centuries and referred to a Romance-based pidgin, also known as Sabir or Petit Mauresque, spoken in the south-eastern coast of the Mediterranean among speakers of Romance languages, Arabs, Berbers and Turkish people (Wansbrough 1996; Cifoletti 2011). During the Middle Ages the expression lingua franca lost its original reference to the language of the Mediterranean and acquired the more general sense of vehicular language as we know it today.

The phenomenon of vehicular languages has been part of human communication for centuries. Linguae francae were one of the instruments that guaranteed the effective functioning of vast empires in ancient times, for instance Latin during the dominance of the Roman Empire and the Greek Koiné in the Macedonian Empire (Meierkord 2006), and that allowed the spread of knowledge and culture in the European network of medieval universities (Latin). At present, the estimated number of linguae francae ranges from 200 to 300 (Mioni 2005, 183), many of which are used locally within the borders of a single country (e.g. Haitian Creole French in Haiti) or among neighbouring states in restricted areas (e.g. Kiswahili in Sub-Saharan Africa), while only a few are increasingly being used as global languages of communication, namely Arabic, English, Hindi/Urdu, and Spanish (Graddol 2004). None of the linguae francae of the present or the past, however, is comparable to ELF, if only for the number of speakers, the geographical spread, and the domains in which it is used (Jenkins 2014, 22). Moreover, when compared with the original lingua franca pidgin, ELF qualifies as a very different phenomenon also from a structural point of view, as it is not the outcome of a mix of

languages, and does not show a limited vocabulary and a simplified syntax (Björkman 2013, 2).

The first definitions of ELF that appeared at the end of the 1990s were influenced by the traditional characterisations of lingua franca and emphasised the status of second language speakers. The nativeness criterion was central to Alan Firth's conceptualisation of ELF as "a 'contact language' between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen *foreign* language of communication" (1996, 240; emphasis in original). This is not surprising, as the focus of Firth's study was on the communicative strategies exploited by non-native speakers of English in business transactions among companies from different nationality groups. Along the same line is House's early definition of ELF, according to which "ELF interactions are defined as interactions between members of two or more different lingua-cultures in English, *for none of whom English is the mother tongue*" (House 1999, 74; emphasis added).

Although these definitions rest on the fact that the great majority of people using English nowadays are non-native speakers and were probably put forward with the aim of highlighting this specific aspect at the outset of ELF research, they soon proved to be reductive in the analysis of such a complex phenomenon (cf. Maley 2010) and were abandoned for a comprehensive approach that would more realistically include speakers from the Inner and Outer Circles and verbal exchanges taking place in these contexts (Seidlhofer 2004, 211). A general conceptualisation of ELF, therefore, has been recently proposed and regards ELF interactions 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*" (Seidlhofer 2011, 7; emphasis in original). In most of the empirical studies based on naturally occurring interactions, however, strict selection criteria are often adopted in the choice of ELF exchanges to be included in the data, to ensure that English native speakers constitute only a small percentage of participants and do not occupy dominant positions in interaction, so that their language does not impinge too much upon genuine ELF data (cf. Breiteneder et al. 2006; Mauranen et al. 2010).

ELF as a new research paradigm

The ELF theoretical framework moves from a complete re-evaluation of the role of non-native speakers in international communication in English. In this perspective, speakers of ELF are no longer conceived as learners situated along an interlanguage continuum, but as language users

in their own right, who do not necessarily take native models as a reference point nor seek cultural affiliation in native speakers' communities, but play an active role in the spread and development of English (Brutt-Griffler 2002). ELF is not seen as a corrupted variety of Standard English characterised by non-idiomatic usage of the language, odd collocations, divergent lexical and grammatical choices which lead to misunderstandings. It is, on the contrary, the place of cooperation, accommodation, creativity and situated negotiation of norms among participants, who make efforts to guarantee intelligibility and successful communication (among others Björkman 2013; Cogo and Dewey 2012; Firth 1996, 2009a; Hülmbauer 2009; Kaur 2009; Mauranen 2012; Seidlhofer 2011).

ELF scholars regard lingua franca communication as a special instance of language contact situation (Mauranen 2006a, 126), which potentially fosters contact-induced changes in English. ELF interactions entail sophisticated mechanisms of language contact, which concern speakers both at the intrapersonal level, i.e. the speaker as an individual, and at the interpersonal level, i.e. when two or more people are involved in communicative exchanges. In the case of intrapersonal language contact, speakers are expected to have a certain degree of bilingualism (or even multilingualism) as they can rely upon at least two language repertoires (their mother tongue(s) and English). As for interpersonal language contact, participants in ELF exchanges usually come from several linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and instances of code-switching, code-mixing and language transfer are not uncommon in their use of English. The result is a noticeable variation in speakers' communicative competence and language proficiency in ELF (what Mauranen (2003) defines as variable learning), which is deemed to be among the major causes of structural and phonological changes in the target language (cf. Thomason 2001).

A point that is often raised in the ELF debate concerns the distinction between ELF speakers and learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), and the implications that this dichotomy has on the conceptual approaches to English. According to Jenkins (2014), learners of EFL generally study the English language to be able to communicate successfully with native speakers, and make a great effort to reach a near-native competence. One of the objectives of EFL learners is to be integrated as members of the native speaker communities, to get to know more about their culture and customs, to learn about their literature and traditions, through a process of imitation and adoption of the linguacultural models (Seidlhofer 2011, 17-19). Furthermore, in formal EFL education in the classroom, divergences from the native norms are

sanctioned as errors that require correction, and instances of code-switching and code-mixing are regarded as strategies to remedy language deficiencies, for example at the lexical or syntactic levels.

ELF speakers, on the contrary, use English as a language of interaction mainly in intercultural communication among non-native speakers, and "are *not* primarily concerned with emulating the way native speakers use their mother tongue within their own communities" (Seidlhofer 2001, 141; emphasis added). Moreover, ELF speakers do not necessarily have native models as a target, and often negotiate linguacultural norms and gauge their level of language to meet the interlocutors' communicative needs in the ongoing interaction. The processes at work in ELF exchanges are better described in terms of accommodation and adaptation (Seidlhofer 2011, 18). Deviant forms, code-switching and code-mixing are not perceived and labelled as transfer or interference errors, but as instances of creative variation used to promote solidarity among non-native speakers, to project personal identities and to prioritise communicative effectiveness (Jenkins 2014, 31). Hence, the metaphors of interlanguage and fossilisation (Selinker 1972) typical of traditional Second Language Acquisition (SLA) studies are deemed useless in the analysis of lingua franca communication. The ELF perspective is that of World Englishes studies and looks at bilingual (and often multilingual) repertoires as valuable resources for diversity and alternative strategies for successful communication. Unlike the World Englishes approach, however, ELF research is not bound with specific post-colonial varieties and nationalisms, but spans across national boundaries (for more details on similarities and differences between ELF and the World Englishes framework see Seidlhofer (2009a)).

ELF user vs. EFL learner: an ongoing debate

This polarised comparison of ELF (user) and EFL (learner) has attracted some criticism. Michael Swan sees EFL and ELF as two sides of the same coin rather than two concepts in opposition, since "EFL leads to ELF" (2012, 388) and at the same time the results of ELF research may assist EFL planning in a positive way. Saraceni (2008, 22) argues that the assumption that ELF speakers do not orient to English native models is questionable, as it is not supported by empirical evidence. As a matter of fact, recent studies seem to demonstrate that participants in ELF exchanges generally *do* abide by the grammatical rules of English native varieties. Among the findings of her Euro-English project aimed at assessing the variety status of English used as lingua franca in continental Europe, Mollin (2006a, 2006b, 2007) reports speakers' divergent uses of

the language with respect to English native norms at various levels of the language system, but concludes that they are rather infrequent and, above all, neither systematic nor widespread. Moreover, by means of questionnaires submitted to over 400 academics across Europe, she documents speakers' preference for native norms as a target variety and a negative attitude towards the incorrect usage of English; deviant forms are considered not acceptable and undesirable by the great majority of informants. Mollin's results are in line with similar surveys conducted on the perception of non-native accents by advanced learners (Braine 2008; Dalton-Puffer et al. 1997; Timmis 2002) and native and non-native speakers of English (Jenkins 2007, 2009), and on the introduction of non-standard structures as teaching models in the classroom (Murray 2003). In these surveys, native accents (American and British accents in particular) are valued more highly and are regarded as a desirable goal to achieve, while non-native accents attract comments that range from mildly positive remarks on their pleasantry and melodiousness to clearly negative attitudes and judgments of incorrectness.

Quite interesting are the findings of another study focused on syntactic variation in ELF. Meierkord (2004) analyses 22 hours of interactions involving non-native speakers of English from the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle, and points out that most of the speakers' utterances comply with the grammatical rules of either British English or American English. On average, 88% of the utterances assessed by the author conform to native varieties, with peaks of 95% in the performance of competent speakers from the Expanding Circle. Less competent speakers, on the other hand, score 73%, which is still quite a high percentage if one considers the lower proficiency level (Meierkord, 2004, 119). On the qualitative side, Meierkord observes that "the majority of [deviant] productions by speakers from the expanding circle [are] characterised by particularities which relate to both the interlanguage character of their form and transfer phenomena" (Meierkord, 2004, 124) and provides some examples of speakers' problems in mastering passive constructions, negation and word order.

A second issue inherent in the ELF vs. EFL dichotomy relates to the speakers' communicative competence in English. It is not always very clear in ELF scholars' positions how the development of communicative competence in ELF should be different from the improvement of learners' language skills as conceived in mainstream acquisitional studies. Jenkins maintains that "ELF speakers, just like EFL [...] speakers, come in a range of proficiency levels" (2006, 141) including expert speakers, individuals that are still ELF learners, and speakers that abandoned the learning

process before reaching the expert ELF level. The author, however, does not provide any explicit indications on when a speaker of ELF is to be considered proficient and ceases to be a learner. Jenkins also contends that "ELF proficiency levels [...] are not the imitations of the English that characterises the different levels of EFL but have their own linguistic characteristics at each stage of development, from beginner to advanced" (2006, 141). Once again, there is no further exemplification nor empirical evidence in support of such a strong claim in her study.

Another problem with Jenkins' distinction between ELF and EFL proficiency clines is linked to the target model individual speakers are supposed to achieve in order to be considered expert speakers of English. She coherently rejects native norms as a target for ELF, but does not provide a fully convincing alternative. In her view the target model for ELF speakers is a language including "both ELF variants that would be considered errors in relation to EFL and, inevitably, given the common ancestor, also variants that *are* native-like, but by default rather than design" (Jenkins, 2006, 141; emphasis in original).

An alternative conceptualisation of proficiency in ELF is contained in Dewey's (2009, 79ff) ELF paradigm, where expertise is conceived as context dependent and locally determined on the base of speaker's ability to exploit linguistic resources in an effective and accommodative way to achieve successful communication. One of the implications connected with this definition of proficiency, as is explained by Dewey, is the heightened variability and necessary diversity of ELF, which is not considered as deviation from native models, but the "creative, enterprising and inevitable result of language interaction" (2009, 78). The notion of learning target is finally discussed in the paradigm and is again defined not in terms of native standards, but according to norms, materials and methods of local relevance.

An interesting point of view on the thorny issue of the distinction between learner language and ELF is offered by Ranta (2009) in an empirical comparative study including data from corpora of ELF (i.e. the ELFA corpus, Mauranen 2006b) and American English (i.e. the MICASE corpus, Simpson et al. 2002). In her study, Ranta questions the validity of the learner/deficit paradigm for ELF speakers by showing how certain 'deviant' syntactic constructions (i.e. verb tenses in hypothetical if-clauses, the existential construction *there is* + plural noun, and verb-subject inversion in embedded indirect questions) regularly found in ELF speech and traditionally considered errors when evaluated against native norms, do in fact appear also in the language of educated L1 speakers, as documented in naturally occurring speech and authoritative sources in the

literature. She concludes that the syntactic features she examined can no longer be considered learner errors, but must be reinterpreted as structures typical of spoken English which are employed by English native and non-native speakers alike.

A slightly different position on the notion of learner in ELF is taken by Firth (2009a), who claims that lingua franca interactions among non-native speakers of English constitute a continuous learning-in-interaction process. L2 speakers interacting in a non-educational environment are more focussed on their professional roles and the task at hand than on linguistic issues that might occur during the exchange. Participants perceive linguistic competence as a "*private matter*" (Firth, 2009a, 132; emphasis in original) and disavow any explicit reference to their own or others' status of 'L2 learners'. At the same time, however, speakers are engaged in the continuous assessment of the interlocutors' competence and calibrate their linguistic behaviour accordingly. In Firth's view, this constitutes a development of interactional and communicative competence on the part of the speaker, in other words an ongoing process of learning. Firth, therefore, does not conceive learners and ELF speakers as two distinct groups (he clearly states that language learning and language use are conceptually inseparable) and advocates a reconceptualisation of the notion of language learning, conceived as a ubiquitous, context sensitive and context dependent social activity in which language users are called on to adapt their knowledge and expertise to the acquisition of new communicative skills. In doing so, Firth builds some fruitful connections between traditional SLA research and new sociocultural approaches to the analysis of naturally occurring L2 interactions outside the classroom, to cast new light on the mechanisms underlying the development of communicative competence in non-native speakers.

Finally, a link between ELF research and SLA concepts is established by Guido (2008) in a study on ELF communication in cross-cultural immigration domains in Italy. The author proposes to revise the very notion of interlanguage and to expand the traditional conceptualisation of transfer to include not only phenomena of interference at the structural level of language (i.e. phonology, morpho-syntax, lexis), but also the cognitive dimension of socio-cultural and experiential schemata informing speakers' L1s. An alternative view on ELF is thus put forward, which conceives ELF discourse not as an attempt to gradually approximate L2-English to English native language standards, but as a process of language authentication and appropriation according to speakers' linguistic backgrounds and socio-cultural schemata (Guido 2008, 21-27).

As clearly emerges from the positions presented above, the matter of the distinction between EFL learners and ELF speakers is not yet resolved. A separation between learners and users seems acceptable from a functional and sociolinguistic point of view if one takes personal identities and perception of self as theoretical constructs. Nonetheless, some problems remain when attention is centred on formal and structural aspects of the English language. Let us now turn to the most significant ELF studies carried out in recent years that embrace formal and functional aspects of ELF at different levels of language, starting with a brief presentation of the two main ELF corpora compiled in European settings and considered the milestones of the corpus-based description of ELF: the VOICE corpus and the ELFA corpus.[5]

A corpus-based description of ELF

In accordance with the methods and technology of computational linguistics and corpus-based approaches to language description, one of the criteria to meet to provide a model that accounts for the 'real' usage of a language on the part of its speakers is to rely upon a large amount of data collected empirically in a variety of settings and domains (Sinclair 1991). Numerous corpora of English have been compiled in the last quarter of the 20th century, e.g. the British National Corpus (Aston and Burnard 1998), the Collins COBUILD Bank of English, the MICASE corpus (Simpson et al. 2002), the BASE corpus (Thompson and Nesi 2001), to mention but a few, producing a solid base for the description and study of L1 varieties of English.

Some efforts have also been made in the creation of large databases for the investigation of international English, aimed at capturing the characteristics of spoken and written language used by people from different first language backgrounds in international exchanges, e.g. the International Corpus of English (ICE), the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE) and its spoken counterpart LINDSEI (Louvain International Database of Spoken English Interlanguage) corpus. Such

[5] It is not being implied that studies based on smaller corpora of ELF are of less importance for the description of ELF. As a matter of fact, some of the studies presented in the overview are based on data collected independently from the VOICE and the ELFA project and have been fundamental for ELF research. Also, the present review of the literature is necessarily limited to the European setting and excludes findings on the Asian ELF context, which are deemed equally valuable for the advancement of knowledge on ELF (see for instance the ACE project, Kirkpatrick 2010a, 2010b, 2012, 2016).

projects, however, have proved to be unsatisfactory for the description of ELF as is meant by mainstream ELF researchers. The ICE corpus, despite the attempts to outline the development of English as a world language, limits the scope to about 20 regional varieties among native and indigenised ones. Countries in which English is not used as a majority first language or as an official additional language are not accounted for in the ICE corpus (i.e. the Expanding Circle to use Kachru's terminology), which means excluding English as used by many non-native speakers around the world. As for the ICLE and LINDSEI corpora, the problem is with the researchers' orientation towards both the data and the objectives of the corpora themselves. The purpose of the ICLE and LINDSEI projects is to investigate the language patterns of learners from different native languages to identify the difficulties they face in the acquisition of English and to put into practice adequate support strategies. Hence, the perspective adopted is a traditional EFL one, which conceives non-native varieties as instances of interlanguage to correct according to the norms of English as a Native Language (ENL).

The sampling criteria of the existing corpora of international English and the approaches taken by scholars in their investigations have been deemed inadequate for the description of ELF and have called for the creation of new corpora specifically designed for such purposes. Among the most important ELF projects is the VOICE corpus (Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English), which has been compiled at the University of Vienna (Breiteneder et al. 2006; Seidlhofer 2010) and is currently freely accessible through an online query interface. The corpus comprises of the transcribed text of about 120 hours of spoken, naturally occurring face-to-face interactions (over one million words) in which English is employed as a vehicular language, covering a range of speech events from professional, educational and leisure domains (e.g. interviews, service encounters, seminar discussions, meetings, conversations, etc.). Participants in the exchanges hold various social roles and professional positions and exhibit different degrees of acquaintance in relationships. The corpus includes instances of English spoken by more than 1,200 fluent speakers from approximately 50 distinct native languages, with a focus on European ELF speakers (even though a few non-European L1s are also accounted for). The spoken medium has been favoured, mainly because speech is less monitored and guarantees more spontaneity than writing, which usually goes through editing processes influenced by native norms and standards. In addition, speech is generally reciprocal and allows researchers to investigate mechanisms of cooperation, adaptation to the

interlocutor, and negotiation of both meaning and form, which are rarer and more difficult to capture in writing.

Another equally important database for ELF research is the one-million-word corpus of English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings (ELFA), compiled at the University of Tampere and the University of Helsinki (Mauranen 2006b; Mauranen et al. 2010) and available on request. The corpus follows compilation principles and sampling criteria similar to the ones already described for VOICE, and comprises of naturally occurring speech events including participants from different L1s for whom English is a second language, and a restricted number of native speakers of English. Unlike the VOICE corpus, the focus of the ELFA database is on academic discourse, considered to be a privileged domain for the description of ELF for many reasons. Firstly, academic language is used by educated people in society, either directly (e.g. in the case of lecturers and students) or indirectly (e.g. professionals who received university education) and has high social prestige. It is therefore very influential in the transmission of language norms and standards. Secondly, academic discourse is more sophisticated than other forms of speech (e.g. routines in service encounters), not only for the intellectual content it conveys, but also for the elaboration it requires before and during the delivery of the message. Finally, the heterogeneous composition of the academic community in terms of age, gender, and professional position, and the variety of teaching and learning activities in which participants are engaged (e.g. seminars, lectures, conferences, thesis defences, and so on) lead to a notable variation in styles, registers and degrees of formality in language.

The phonology of ELF

The first comprehensive study carried out on ELF interactions unsurprisingly pertains to the description of phonological features. The phonology of a language can be considered a relatively closed system if compared to other linguistic aspects such as morpho-syntax and pragmatics, as it is characterised by a restricted number of segmental (i.e. consonants, vowels and semi-vowels) and suprasegmental items (i.e. intonation, word stress, pitch movement, rhythm). But, above all, pronunciation is a particularly relevant matter in ELF research for the significant variation of accents across ELF speakers and the phonological transfer from their L1s, which may constitute a major source of communication breakdown in international exchanges.

In the ground-breaking book *The Phonology of English as an International Language* (OUP, 2000), Jennifer Jenkins addresses the issue of intelligibility in international exchanges among non-native speakers of English and provides a description of ELF phonological features. She relies upon audio-recordings and field observation of interactions in English occurring in multilingual classrooms and social contexts, focusing on some aspects of pronunciation that cause intelligibility problems at the phonological level. Her aim is to identify the phonological and phonetic features of English that lead to miscommunication when they are not produced correctly following the main models of Standard English. She names such features the Lingua Franca Core (LFC) of English pronunciation. On the contrary, non-target phonological realisations due to L1 transfer which do not impinge upon intelligibility are placed at the periphery of the ELF phonological system and classified as non-core features. Jenkins considers these deviant realisations the natural expression of non-native speakers' regional accents that can be preserved in interaction and do not need to be corrected according to native English norms.

The main LFC elements put forward by Jenkins (2000, 2002) can be summarised as follows:

- All the elements of the consonant inventory of English are included in the LFC except for the voiceless and voiced dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/, and the dark (velarised) /l/ allophone [ɫ], which can be replaced with other sounds (e.g. /t, d/ or /f, v/ or /s, z/) without affecting intelligibility.
- The omission of consonant sounds in word-initial clusters is not allowed, whereas it is permitted in middle and final position, but only in accordance with the rules of English syllable structure.
- As for vowel sounds, the contrast between short and long vowels (e.g. /ɪ/ and /i:/ in words such as 'l<u>i</u>ve' and 'l<u>ea</u>ve') needs to be maintained, while L2 regional variation in vowel quality is admitted, provided that it is consistent.
- The sound /ɜ:/ as in 'b<u>i</u>rd' is a core feature and needs to be kept, as its substitution regularly causes problems.
- Additional phonetic requirements of the LFC include the aspiration in word-initial fortis (voiceless) stops /p/, /t/, /k/, which otherwise would sound like their lenis (voiced) counterparts /b/, /d/, /g/, and the shortening of vowel sounds occurring before fortis consonants (e.g. shorter /æ/ in 's<u>a</u>t' vs. longer /æ/ in 's<u>a</u>d', shorter /i:/ in 's<u>ea</u>t' vs. longer /i:/ in 's<u>ee</u>d').