Contextualising English as a Lingua Franca

Contextualising English as a Lingua Franca:

From Data to Insights

Edited by

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CHAPTER ONE

MULTILINGUALISM ACROSS DOMAINS

XAVIER MARTIN-RUBIÓ

The title of this volume is *Contextualizing English as a Lingua Franca: From Data to Insights*. It is no surprise, then, that English as a lingua franca (ELF), understood as English used "in a lingua franca scenario" (Mortensen 2013), is the main object of study of all the contributions here compiled. The volume has, after all, developed from some of the presentations delivered at the 9th International Conference of English as a Lingua Franca, held in Lleida (Catalonia) on 27–29 June 2016. The other word in the main title, "contextualizing", establishes the goal of all the contributions: to better understand the use of English in a variety of lingua franca scenarios through the collection and analysis of data in different contexts. The volume aims at contributing to filling in the gap identified by Seidlhofer (2011) when she argued that there was "an urgent need for much more descriptive work on how ELF is successfully used in different contexts". The volume contains an introductory chapter followed by 10 chapters divided into three parts.

Part I of the volume focuses on computer-mediated communication in which English plays an important role. In Chapter 2, Rino Bosso collects data from a hybrid community in Vienna; the members of this community are international students who live in a student dorm and who meet both online and offline. English is their best choice as a lingua franca, and it is mainly through English that they ask for and provide advice, or create group solidarity, in their contributions on Facebook. Apart from English, though, they resort to German expressions, emoticons and pictures of doors, among other resources. In Chapter 3, Inmaculada Pineda collects data from students who are taking a teacher training course at Universidad de Málaga. The students engage in different kinds of computer-mediated communication as part of the course, such as posting on Facebook a link to a digital resource and a text describing how they would use the resource to teach English. The data of Chapter 4, by

Veronika Q. Novotná, Šárka Císařová and James Tufano, are the messages posted in the forum tool of the Moodle platform of several 10-week-long academic writing courses organized by the Centre for Academic Writing within the Czech Academy of Sciences. The data of these three chapters share two important elements: English is the language used the most, and the data is typewritten using the new technologies. In all other aspects the data varies greatly: a Spanish student in Vienna asking for advice on how to keep the cleaning ladies out of his room and getting the advice from Turkish colleagues who live in the same student dorm; students editing videos and posting comments online as a way to acquire new ways of engaging their future English students; and scholars learning how to improve their academic writing skills but also reflecting on the weight their cultural origins (should) have on their academic writing styles.

Part II focuses on the diversity of contents and domains in which ELF plays an important role. In Chapter 5, by Lien Thi Hanh Bui, the data employed are interviews with Vietnamese university students in the UK, so the targeted domain is the higher education sector. The chapter looks at the role these students' identities play in their language learning and language use. In Chapter 6, Natasha Tsantila and Anastasia Georgountzou carry out an experiment in which a group of Greek students of English are asked to rate the comprehensibility of a group of multilingual speakers from different parts of the world, all of whom have English in their repertoires. In Chapter 7, by Jiřina Dunková, Czech students in the Czech Republic are observed in class and asked through a questionnaire about the reasons why they are studying English. Chapter 8, by Julia Boyd and Mette Rudvin, moves out of the educational domain and covers encounters between asylum seekers and Italian officials. The authors explore the impact of mis- and non-understandings in these kinds of high-stakes interactions. All of these studies share a focus on the complexity of the use and learning of an additional language, and on how psycho-sociological factors need to be taken into account when studying the process of learning a language and the consequences of (not) knowing a language variety in certain contexts.

Part III is dedicated to initiatives in Japan, Brazil, Italy and Turkey to carry out an ELF-informed pedagogy. In Chapter 9, Yaeko Hori describes her efforts to improve the motivation of her Japanese students of English by making them reflect on the role English plays in the world and by paying attention to intercultural elements of communication. In Chapter 10, Ana Duboc, Bianca Garcia and Lívia Rodrigues describe the bottom-up process of creating a syllabus for primary schools in Brazil in which the tenets of ELF are taken into consideration. Finally, in Chapter 11 Yasemin

Bayyurt, Lucilla Lopriore and Paola Vettorel carry out a comparative analysis of three initiatives in their three universities to make students aware of the importance of ELF in their future teaching careers.

There have been two main guiding principles throughout the long editing process for this volume, from the initial call for abstracts a few weeks after the conference to the submission of the definitive manuscript, and I would like to explain why they have been so important. The first guiding principle was the need for a diversity of contexts and domains. I think the volume clearly shows a diversity of contexts, but I would have liked greater diversity of domains, and I think this is something ELF researchers should start seriously taking into consideration. Jenkins (2015, 62) refers to the ELF research of the past few years as "too self-contained, too repetitive" and "lacking the cutting edge it had previously had", and I believe this is due to the insistence on a reduced number of domains when in fact English is being used as a lingua franca across most domains nowadays. The way I see it, there are currently two well-established perspectives that keep generating new knowledge within the field. The first perspective refers to the study of encounters in which people with different linguistic backgrounds resort to English to communicate; these might be sporadic encounters or regular encounters (as with people who work together on a project, or Erasmus students spending a semester at the same university), and the participants might need to resort to English because English is their only shared language, or they might want to use English because they prefer it to other shared codes. The Spanish student at the dorm in Vienna who uses English to ask for advice is clearly using English in a lingua franca context. English is also present in the conversations between the migrant and the Italian official, for instance. The second perspective is ELF as an ideology or a teaching approach: it is English language teaching (ELT) "with an attitude", one could say, much in line with how van Dijk (1998) saw critical discourse analysis as discourse analysis "with an attitude". In this sense, it is about legitimizing proficient English use that, however, does not strictly follow the accuracy norms of the speakers raised in English in certain historically English-speaking regions of the world. The integration of local expressions in the English lessons shown in Chapter 11, or the demand for a more communicative goal in the lessons from some respondents in the study reported in Chapter 7, for instance, are examples of the kind of work that adopts this ideological interpretation of what ELF stands for. I think that ELF researchers need to keep covering different socio-political contexts and strengthening the two perspectives just described, but also widen the spectrum of domains under investigation in order to minimize this sense of

repetitiveness: There are so many business meetings, block rehearsals in film shootings, medical or legal consultations, trials and police interrogations to investigate.

The second guiding principle is the presence of data in all the contributions, and the idea that data analysis is the best way to gain insights that can help reformulate definitions and theories; or, in other words, theory discussion is much better advanced when accompanied by data collection and analysis. I agree with Jenkins (2015, 57) that "theorizing cannot stop for as long as the complex phenomenon of ELF exists and new empirical evidence about its nature continues to emerge". Since I want to preach by example, I will use the analysis of data generated in the process of editing the present volume to engage in the kind of "re-theorization" Jenkins (2015) asks for.

On 20th August 2016, I sent an email with a call for extended abstracts to the more than 150 participants of the 9th International Conference of English as a Lingua Franca, which took place, as mentioned at the outset of the chapter, between the 27th and the 29th of June 2016 at Universitat de Lleida under the title "Framing English within multilingual policies and practices". There were 36 responses, with their corresponding abstracts. These authors came from different parts of the world; they all had their different linguistic repertoires, and English was present in all these repertoires, which is why the email that contained the call had been written in English. Everyone wrote back in English, except for one person who wrote in Spanish—a doctoral student at a university not far from Lleida who also had Spanish in her repertoire, and with whom I had talked a couple of times during the conference. The email actually contained two words in English, which the sender had typed between single quotation marks: "Te envío nuestro 'extended abstract' para su posible publicación". The 36 abstracts went through a selection process, after which the authors of 14 of them were asked to submit a full paper by mid-December. The abstract of this doctoral student was not among the 14 selected ones, and the rejection notification was a general email indicating that if they were receiving the email, it meant they had not been selected, so I did not get any other emails from the author of the sole Spanish email. I did, however, get another message in Spanish in late November from the author of one of the 14 accepted abstracts. The message contained 52 words, including "draft", which appeared twice, and "paper", but none of these English words contained any element that emphasized the words as a way to indicate they belonged to a language different from Spanish. The author could have used Spanish equivalents, but she had decided to use the English expressions in an otherwise Spanish email. We must bear in mind

that this author had sent a previous message, the one in which the abstract had been submitted, in English, and that she would write three more emails after the one in Spanish, also entirely in English. I did not reply in Spanish to her Spanish email, so she just stuck to English. The author finally decided to pull out from the project, so our mediated communication ended there.

That was not the case with Inmaculada Pineda, who is the author of Chapter 3 of this volume. We exchanged 33 emails, 19 written by her and 14 by me, before I decided to use our emails during the editing process as material for this volume's introductory chapter. I asked for her permission to use the emails and also sent her a few questions; she accepted the proposal and provided answers to the questions. In order to refer to the emails in a systematic way, I have decided to codify them with the following system: "E" and a number from 1 to 33 to indicate the position of the email within the chain, followed by either "I" or "X" (for Inma and Xavi) and a number from 1 to 19 and 1 to 14, respectively, to indicate the order within our individual body of emails. The first thing that caught my attention about the emails was that all but two were in English. Email E05I03 read: "Con adjunto! Sorry! Inma." This email was sent three minutes after E04I02, in which Inma had written: "Dear Xavi, Thank you for your advice. I attach my abstract. Gràcies. Inma." Since E04I02 did not contain the promised attachment, E05I03 was sent with the attachment to fix the problem. The other email in Spanish was E09I05, which read: "Genial! Me encanta! Inma." The remaining 31 emails were all in English, except for a specific expression: "Gràcies!", which is "Thank you" in Catalan. Inma used this expression to close 12 of her 19 emails—six times with the word standing on its own, four times in combination with "Thank you", "Thank you so much" or "Have a nice summer", and twice in the form "As always, gràcies". Inma closed one email with "Best regards," (it was her first email) and four with "Thank you" and "Thank you again". She did not close the remaining two. As for my 14 emails, I only closed eight, and I used "All the best" on four occasions, and "Take care", "Thanks in advance", "Cheers" and "Yours sincerely" on the remaining occasions. I asked Inma about the repeated use of the Catalan expression in her emails, and she replied that thanking "in the other people's language" was something she tended to do with her international friends as a way to show deference and gratefulness, and to sound less business-like. This made me think of my closings. The most formal ones were, after all, emails addressed to a lot of people at once. And although it is true that I did not close many emails, I realized that I did use a happy-face emoticon

at the end of emails E03X02 and E08X04, most likely with the same goal of making the emails less business-like.

While carrying out this analysis, there were two elements that I had difficulties with from an ELF perspective. The first was the presence of languages other than English in the data; the second was a problem with the definition of "ELF" itself. I will start with the second. The most widely used ELF definition reads as follows: "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; my italics). The one I have used in the opening lines, by Mortensen (2013), does not contain the phrase "different first languages", but the definition is actually simply avoiding the issue by not describing the speakers and referring only to the scenario. What happens when, for instance, two multilingual speakers use English despite sharing their "first language" (L1)? Would that be a lingua franca context? Clearly not, as they could resort to their L1 to communicate. Would it be an ELF conversation? In Seidlhofer's (2011) definition, it would not. In the case of Inma and I, it would all depend on whether Inma and I have different first languages or not. What makes this particularly intriguing for me is that although I know Catalan is my first language, I have never known what to say about Spanish. I learned it at school at a very early age, and given that in the area near Barcelona where I was born Catalan and Spanish are constantly intertwined in conversations, I have always regarded myself as a balanced bilingual in Catalan and Spanish. This would mean Inma and I have a first language in common, thus rendering our English emails outside the scope of ELF.

The other problematic aspect was the presence of Spanish and Catalan in the emails. I see resonances in some of the contributions to this volume. The asylum seeker and the Italian official in Chapter 8, for instance, use some Italian in their conversation. They use mostly English because the asylum seeker's level of English is a bit better than his level of Italian and the Italian official does not speak any of the languages of the asylum seeker, yet there is much more than English to the conversation. The same goes for the German expressions in Chapter 2. Jenkins (2015), after describing the two phases ELF has gone through since its beginnings, which she calls "ELF1" and "ELF2", proposes a new phase (ELF3), in which, she argues, more attention should be paid to the multilingual nature of ELF encounters. The author affirms that in many ELF studies references to concepts like "multilingual repertoire" or "shared resources" are often just "mentioned in passing with no further comment", and that multilingualism is often seen as next to ELF rather than encapsulating ELF

(Jenkins 2015, 63). I wonder, however, how ELF can deal with what is not English in those emails, Facebook posts or interviews. Jenkins (2015, 66) states that the kind of renewed ELF she proposes would "allow for situations in which English is not used but is potentially available to all in the interaction, or for situations in which participants choose to speak primarily in another of their mutual languages, but 'slip into' English from time to time". If taken literally, this would seem to suggest that two people who were talking in Spanish and who happened to know English could be said to be engaging in English as a multilingua franca. Although the author argues that in English as a multilingua franca, "ELF is conceived within a framework of multilingualism (versus multilingualism within a framework of ELF)" (Jenkins 2015, 75), I find it hard to justify including English in the label at all. Maybe ELF as a brand is trying to cater for situations that are in fact better served from a more basic analysis of multilingualism in society—of languaging understood as the use of one's full linguistic repertoire in order to communicate. It is true that there is a need to investigate beyond English, but I do not think ELF can do that since ELF is, after all, *English* as a lingua franca. I believe ELF as a community needs to reflect on the limits of the field, or the label. I have entitled the chapter "Multilingualism across domains" because one of the points I want to raise is that there certainly is a need to deal with the multilingual nature of conversations where several languages are used, but that this does not necessarily entail singling out English.

To me, the focus should be on how different people in different contexts and domains use different languages and other semiotic resources to communicate. There might be cases in which an ELF approach suffices; nevertheless, when it is not clear whether the encounter is a lingua franca scenario or not, or when the percentage of English in the conversation is minimal, then it is probably wiser to just adopt a wider perspective—to go to the "superordinate". We can obviously study ELF, and then German as a lingua franca, and Spanish as a lingua franca; however, it makes more sense to study multilingual people languaging in different contexts and domains. At the end of the day, what matters is the context of the encounters: Inma and I are researchers specialized in English, but we are also speakers of Spanish (in her case) and of Spanish and Catalan (in mine). I have a B1 in German, and Inma A2 in German and French. We also both know expressions in other languages and have knowledge about the use of emoticons, about formality rules and other conventions. Additionally, we do our best to convey not just messages but also things such as emotions, beliefs and identity. In this "superordinate" multilingualism-languaging approach, we would probably focus more on

repertoires, proficiency levels and contexts and less on foreign languages, national culture and native speakers. I see it as somehow in between two extremes: the one where languages are regarded as clearly-defined bounded units, and the extreme of Makoni and Pennycook's (2012, 447) "lingua franca multilingualism" where "languages are so deeply intertwined and fused into each other that the level of fluidity renders it difficult to determine any boundaries that may indicate that there are different languages involved". There might be contexts in which such an approach is required, but the kind of data I have dealt with in my research so far have not necessitated such a position. This might be due to the still-dominant nationalist discourse in the context I have investigated in which monolingualism in the national language is regarded as the natural state of affairs; however, the truth is that there are fuzzy but recognizable boundaries between the languages used by the participants in my research. When Inma writes "As always, gràcies", she is clearly using English and Catalan, and she is doing it for a purpose, and this is what I think is worth investigating.

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PART I:

COMPUTER-MEDIATED ELF

CHAPTER TWO

FIRST STEPS IN EXPLORING COMPUTER-MEDIATED ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA

RINO BOSSO

1. The affordances of Web 2.0 for the study of intercultural communication via ELF

The Web offers a multitude of virtual venues where a wide range of activities can take place. These are virtual settings for transaction and interaction. Among the many possible activities, those of a commercial kind figure prominently and include transactions that result in selling and buying commodities and services online. Sustained computer-mediated interaction, however, can also give rise to new community formations, and users who interact with each other online come to "share a set of understandings which render the production of a web page a form of social action" (Hine 2000, 148). Under the umbrella term "social action" many kinds of activities may fall: these are not so much concerned with transaction, but rather with interaction. Examples include the exchange of information and socialization between Internet users. Hine enumerates what Internet users can do online as follows:

> They use the Internet for work, for leisure, for information and for shopping. They explore new relationships and sustain existing ones. They assess what they see online in relation to what they know to be sensible and appropriate using interpretative codes earned online and imported from offline settings. (Hine 2000, 32)

The interactive potential of Web 2.0 has had an unprecedented effect on computer-mediated communication (CMC): Internet users have been empowered, and their status has risen dramatically, from that of mere consumers of information to that of authors actively involved in the production of texts as well as in interaction with other users. Transactions,

interactions and all the other activities performed by humans via the Web generate a big pool of Web-data that may be attractive to sociologists, psychologists, business and marketing experts and lawyers, as well as to many other practitioners and scholars. Among the latter, linguists seem to have developed a keen interest in CMC, especially over the last two decades. They may be attracted to the Web, in the first place, because of the great deal of naturally occurring language data that are generated by Internet users:

> If any group of scholars ought to be interested in CMC, it is linguists. Indeed, CMC is arguably the greatest boon to the study of language use since the invention of the portable tape recorder in the 1950's. Like the tape recorder, it makes possible the analysis of naturally occurring communication on a scale that was previously unimaginable. (Herring 1996, 155)

Linguists who are interested in globalization phenomena and in contemporary ways of communicating, and who want to base their analyses on solid empirical evidence, cannot neglect the importance of CMC via PCs, tablets, and smartphones. CMC is now part of everyday communicative routines, along with more traditional ways of communicating, such as face-to-face interactions. This hybrid way of communicating that is both human-to-human and computer-mediated can be observed in a wide range of communities, organizations and social formations, including multicultural groups. In particular, asynchronous CMC allows for global communication to take place in virtual settings via English, despite time and spatial divides among Internet users. Communities of Internet users in which interaction is only computer-mediated have been referred to as "virtual communities" and conceived of as "globally scattered members, sharing knowledge through providing solutions, posting questions, and debating and discussing issues of shared interests" (Sarma and Matheus 2015, 571); however, research on CMC has also paid attention to those communities of Internet users who live in close proximity. The latter are referred to as "hybrid communities" (HCs) "consisting of people who interact together socially using both online and offline methods of communication" (Gaved and Mulholland 2005, 2). In such HCs social relationships in the actual physical space "can be established before the creation of the online community—i.e. members of the physical community extend their levels of face-to-face contact to include online spaces" (Navarrete, Huerta and Horan 2008, 127); therefore, "one must question the potential of CMC for the production of

social space. Could it perhaps *re*produce 'real' social relations in a 'virtual' medium?" (Jones 1998, 9; italics in the original).

The emergence of new kinds of communities as a result of developments in information and communications technologies represents a turning point in sociolinguistics with respect to the traditional understanding of speech communities as "homogenous, immobile, stable groupings based on a shared history, a common 'native' language, and geographical proximity" (Seargent and Tagg 2014, 10). In particular, ELF, as a feature of globalization, calls for a rethinking of conventional understandings of the term "community": "Communities 2.0", whether merely virtual or hybrid, can indeed consist of heterogeneous groupings of members who may not share the same linguacultural background, but who are nevertheless able to communicate via ELF.

When it comes to the use of English as a means for intercultural communication, while many empirically-based studies have focused on face-to-face, spoken ELF interactions, CMC has not received the same amount of attention. The importance of the Web as a virtual setting for CMC in several languages and the crucial role played by ELF is, however, acknowledged by the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) in its "Ethical Decision Making in Internet Research": "The committee—whose members represent eleven national cultures—is acutely aware that English, while currently the *lingua franca* of the Web, is but one of many languages in which important research and reflection takes place" (AoIR 2002, 2).

Despite the recognition of the important role played by English in multicultural online communication, there still is a striking imbalance between the large number of publications which focus on spoken or written ELF and the few which deal with its use in CMC (e.g., Grazzi 2013; Vettorel 2014). More empirically-based studies of computer-mediated interactions would add a new level of description to online communication via ELF. As argued by Seidlhofer in her definition, ELF is "***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; italics in the original, bold added). What the definition above seems to suggest with the phrase "any use of English" is that all forms of ELF communication are worth exploring: spoken, written and computer-mediated ELF. As far as the latter is concerned, in view of the enormous—and growing—number of its users worldwide, which amounts to "2.01 billion monthly active users as of June 30, 2017" (Facebook Newsroom 2017), Facebook appears to be an ideal virtual setting for

investigating computer-mediated English as a lingua franca (CMELF) interactions.

As will be discussed in the following sections, this paper takes a closer look at the computer-mediated communicative routines of a multicultural HC to explore what it is that ELF users do online with words which they cannot or do not want to do face-to-face, and what communicative goals they achieve by communicating in this way.

2. CMELF data collection and analysis: some methodological reflections

It is the purpose of the following sections to address the methodological and ethical issues involved in investigating CMELF use in a specific HC, operating in a well-defined physical context, and communicating on Facebook over extended periods of time. On the basis of the data collected in this context, an analytical framework for exploring CMELF discourse will be proposed in section 2.3.

2.1 The making of a Hybrid Ethnography

The advantages of carrying out ELF research focusing on the virtual venues that the Web opens up to linguistic enquiry are threefold. First, Web-data is generated in a large number of countries worldwide, and its observation allows the study of both localized language phenomena and phenomena that may pertain to globalization processes, for "global cultural forms are not free-floating but are always reinscribed in new time-space contexts, relocated and relocalised in specific cultural environments" (Rubdy and Alsagoff 2014, 7). Also, according to Hine, "[i]t is essential to treat telecommunications and computer-mediated communications networks as *local* phenomena, as well as global networks" (Hine 2000, 30; italics in the original). In particular, the Web may offer an opportunity to carry out studies that outline the characteristics of CMELF within specific multicultural HCs whose results may be compared against the findings of similar studies focusing on HCs based in other locations, because "what is important for empirical research is that its results be potentially [reproduceable] by others" (Herring 1996, 159). Second, the practice of collecting written postings from the Internet is rather evidently a much less tedious procedure than tape-recording spoken data and transcribing it. In fact, "CMC is pre-transcribed—participants have typed in the 'data' themselves" (Herring 1996, 156). Third, in traditional, face-to-face ethnographies, spoken interactions were usually the object of study, and

the only way for ethnographers to keep a record of these is to place microphones in the field setting that are as visible to informants as the ethnographer is. If, therefore, on the one hand, traditional ethnographies strive for gathering naturally occurring language samples without interfering with their creation, on the other hand the methodologies that have to be adopted are far from discreet and could potentially distract informants from their communicative practices. The paradoxical relationship between the aims of traditional ethnographies and their practical realization is very well captured by Labov (1972, 209) when he argues that the "aim of linguistic research in the community must be to find out how people talk when they are not systematically observed; yet we can only obtain these data by systematic observation".

In virtual settings, researchers are not as visible to their informants as would be the case in more traditional settings; as a consequence, the "observer's paradox" is (at least partially) solved:

> Ethnographers in cyberspace can, of course, lurk in a way that face-to-face ethnographers cannot readily achieve. An observer who might be physically visible and marked as different in a face-to-face setting even when silent, can simply merge invisibly with all the other lurkers in an online setting. (Hine 2000, 48)

Having access to the field setting where informants operate and taking field notes have traditionally been important steps in ethnography. An attentive observation of the field setting and its actors represents a crucial part of ethnographic research, for ethnography, according to Hammersley and Atkinson,

> in its most characteristic form […] involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions—in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of research. (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, 1)

When it comes to the use of the Internet as a means for communicating, current approaches to ethnography recognize the importance of considering the relationship between the physical place and the virtual space in which Internet users interact. In particular, according to Miller and Slater (2000, 21), "an ethnographic approach to the Internet is one that sees it as embedded in a specific place" and, as argued by Jordan:

> The look and feel of ethnography has changed as research increasingly focuses on the digital, both by investigating the virtual communities per se, and in tracking how the Web enters in people's daily existence. Thus,

> current investigations of the hybrid spaces we live in appear to fall into two categories. *Virtual ethnographies* are based on field work carried out exclusively in the virtual world, while *hybrid ethnographies* explore how people design, encounter, and use the Internet in their physical, real world lives. (Jordan 2009, 185; italics in the original)

What members of the multicultural HC under investigation in this study have in common is that they are international students in Vienna who live in close proximity for a duration of time which may range from a semester (for example, those who are Erasmus students in Vienna) to several years (such as those who are studying for a full degree in this city). Their need to communicate prompts them to use ELF and CMELF, because otherwise they would not have a common language and therefore they would not understand each other. And the reason why they *need* to communicate with each other is that, for many of them, living in the student dorm represents their first experience as young adults who start living away from home, from their parents, and from their friends. They need to establish new social relationships, and they look for advice and comfort from those whom they can relate to, because they are facing similar challenges. The very fact that they embark on a shared life experience in the same location for a long period of time allows their interactions to center around the various concerns they may have with regards to their everyday life challenges in Vienna, and in the student dorm in particular. Despite having the possibility to interact face-to-face, HC members also use a Facebook group for their computer-mediated interactions. This is because in the dorm most students live alone in small single-occupancy studio flats. If, on the one hand, the walls that surround them protect their private sphere, on the other hand, they also isolate them from other inhabitants in the dorm. The very fact that there are "physical barriers" between them led me to formulate the hypothesis that, in order to interact with each other, they would tend to use the virtual setting very frequently, as a "barrier-free" extension of the physical one. As a matter of fact, the 94 members of the HC who agreed to participate in the study and gave me permission to use their postings on Facebook produced several thousands of computer-mediated ELF speech acts during the two-year data collection phase (from 1st October 2014 to 30th September 2016). A longitudinal study of this kind allows a continuous observation of given language phenomena in computer-mediated utterances that do not conform to Standard English usage but are nevertheless appropriate to the specific context in which they are put to communicative use. Moreover, knowing the informants personally and having access to the physical context in which they live can offer important insights as to the circumstances under

which particular linguistic forms occur in CMELF text. As argued by Widdowson, "we identify a stretch of language as text when we recognize that it is intended to be related to a context. How we interpret a text is a matter of realizing that relationship" (2004, 36).

Until June 2015 I was present in the actual physical setting, and I had the chance to interact with my informants face-to-face, learn about them and ask them questions about their use of Facebook as a means for communicating with other residents in the dorm. These interactions with participants in the study proved to be very insightful, for "what constitutes a particular strength of hybrid studies is the combination of online observation and participation with offline interviewing of the participants" (Jordan 2009, 185). This is therefore a hybrid ethnography that, despite focusing on computer-mediated text as its object, also aims at understanding how the ethnographic object is shaped by the specific local context in which it is embedded. The focus of my ethnography is on how communities of ELF users that exist in the physical world take advantage of the affordances of the Internet to extend their levels of interaction to virtual spaces. In the words of Jones, "hybrid ethnographies […] focus precisely on what virtual researchers ignore, namely how digital activities are embedded in people's daily lives, be that information seeking, blogging, emailing, or game playing" (2009, 185). Despite my presence in the actual physical setting, I did not participate in the CMELF interactions which took place in the virtual field setting (the Facebook group), and I did not ask informants to post any messages to the Facebook group. This choice was motivated by the intention to avoid interfering in the development of the ethnographic object: naturally occurring, non-elicited, CMELF interactions. The preservation of the ethnographic object is of the utmost importance in an applied linguistic qualitative research project, as "qualitative research takes place in the *natural setting*, without any attempts to manipulate the situation under study" (Dörnyei 2007, 38; italics in the original). This, of course, does not mean that there is no intervention at all on the side of the researcher; the gathering of informed consent, for example, always brings about some interaction with informants. Even though I got to know most of my informants well in the physical setting, I decided to step back from the virtual setting in order to "achieve an acceptable degree of 'objectivity'" (Duranti 1997, 85) required for the subsequent data analysis.

Methodologically, collecting Web-data might seem to be an easy task and to offer several advantages; however, in the following section it will be shown that ethical issues are to be considered carefully when collecting such data. In particular, the potential risks for the participants

involved in the study have to be taken into account while planning the ethnography, and the responsibilities—both moral and legal—of researchers toward the human subjects who join their studies should not be overlooked.

2.2 Ethical implications of CMELF data collection on Facebook

How can informants be protected? Preserving their anonymity is one way to do so; however, this may not be enough. In fact, depending on the kind of data collected and, in particular, on the characteristics of the virtual settings under investigation, researchers may need to gather informed consent from human subjects to collect their Web-based data. As specified under point 2.9 of the "Recommendations on Good Practice in Applied Linguistics" from the British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL), "[i]n the case of an open-access site, where contributions are publicly archived, and informants might reasonably be expected to regard their contributions as public, individual consent may not be required. In other cases it will normally be required" (2017, 7). In particular, as argued by Herring (1996), when private groups are investigated more stringent ethical requirements in terms of informed consent may apply, because "what is said is only intended for the members of the group, although the researcher may be a participant observer in the group, and in that role part of the intended audience" (Herring 1996, 158).

While carrying out my research project, I have myself been a member of a private Facebook group and an observer of the interactions taking place in that virtual space. In addition to this, I have also been present in the physical place where members of this Facebook group live. Since contents posted to the Facebook group under analysis are not publicly archived, I have collected CMELF interactions only upon receiving informed consent from the informants, and after having consulted the Facebook site policy. The "Statement of Rights and Responsibilities" (Facebook 2015), under point 2: Sharing Your Content and Information, clearly specifies that as a Facebook user "you own all of the content and information you post on Facebook, and you can control how it is shared through your privacy and application settings" (Facebook 2015). If Facebook users are the owners of the content they post, and if they post this content to a specific virtual context, a question arises as to whether a researcher can ever legitimately displace such content from its original virtual context, and place it somewhere else, without asking for permission to do so. This is a crucial aspect from an ethical point of view, for academic research involves data collection and its use in settings and

for audiences that differ from the original audience those messages where written for. Examples include, but are not limited to, the use of those messages for presentations at conferences or in scholarly publications. In addition to this, contacting potential informants to ask for informed consent may also offer the opportunity to ask them for some additional information—some metadata that will help researchers to find answers to the following questions: a) Who are the subject posters? Real individuals? Computer software that generates strings of words? A group of real persons, such as the marketing team of a company? b) If posters are real individuals, what is their language background? Having access to this rather basic information about informants may provide useful insights when analyzing CMC, and CMELF in particular. In fact, metadata does not only play a role in the determination of statistical figures. Knowing the language background of informants may, for example, be helpful when a linguist approaches the qualitative analysis of data; for instance, certain language phenomena may appear to be rather frequent in given subgroups of informants who share the same native language, so that these phenomena can be explained as cases of transfer from their L1s.

In order to protect the privacy of participants in this study, their data has been anonymized and aliases used in place of their real names (or Facebook nicknames). As a further measure to protect their privacy, the exact location and name of the student dorm where they live have been kept secret. This is in line with Herring's recommendation that "computer-mediated groups be not identified by name or any other distinguishing feature; this, in combination with disguising the identity of the message poster, would make it exceedingly difficult for anyone to discover the message source" (1996, 158). All the ethical and methodological considerations made thus far have informed the making of the hybrid ethnography that has been carried out for the aims of this study. As will be explained in the following section, this project aims to find out what speech acts are produced by ELF users when they interact online and how the combination of verbal and non-verbal signs is functionally motivated by the need to achieve their communicative goals.

2.3 An analytical framework for CMELF

In their interactions ELF users often do not conform to native-speaker norms, and the reason for this is self-evident: ELF is used in intercultural interactions in which a plurality of voices contributes to the development of a discourse that aims at mutual understanding within heterogeneous groupings of people. As argued by Seidlhofer, "formal properties of ELF

are functionally motivated, and since the functions they are required to serve differ from those served by the forms of native-speaker usage, their non-conformity is a natural consequence of appropriate communicative adaptation" (Seidlhofer 2011, 124). Such task-oriented language usage can be manifest in both physical and virtual settings, and its concrete realizations are context-dependent:

> All interaction, including CMC, is simultaneously situated in multiple external contexts. Rather than disappearing when one logs on, the preexisting speech communities in which interactants operate provide social understandings and practices through and against which interaction in the new computer-mediated context develops. The CMC use always is nested in the national and international cultures of which its participants are members. From this they draw **a common language (usually but not always English)**, common ways of speaking, and a good deal of shared understandings. (Baym 1998, 40; bold added)

This paper positions itself within the field of ELF research and aims to investigate its use within a multicultural HC by applying discourse analysis, and by focusing on the analysis of the illocutionary force and perlocutionary effect of speech acts performed by members of such an HC. Discourse analysis in this project is used to explore how speech acts are realized in a multicultural HC and how their members "read plausible meanings *into* a text, prompted by the purpose and conditioned by the context" (Widdowson 2004, 19; italics in the original). Context here refers, on the one hand, to the situational context which is bound to the immediate physical setting (the student dorm in Vienna); on the other hand, it has also to be conceived of in broader, more abstract terms, as interactional context within multicultural HCs whose members have different language backgrounds as well as different cultural schemata in their minds that prompt them to structure their thoughts in different ways. This is due to the fact that,

> while it may be true that ultimately what is inside the individual's head is an idiosyncratic medley of contextual assumptions of all kinds born of personal experience which cannot be pinned down, it is also the case that there are a wide range of assumptions that are culturally shared as schematic knowledge, which define an individual as a member of a community. (Widdowson 2004, 43)

Since such schemata are culturally bound, it is crucial to see what speech acts are effective in multicultural interactions and how meaning is negotiated, as well as how the interrelations between text, context and pretext come into play to allow for mutual understanding via CMELF and

lead to the achievement (or non-achievement) of pragmatic communicative goals. In order to understand CMELF interactions in the virtual space—that is, on the webpage—there consequently has to be "a recognition of both the context in which the page was produced and the web context into which it is inserted" (Hine 2000, 26).

The Facebook postings produced by members of the HC under investigation in this study are conceived of as computer-mediated utterances, made of one or more speech acts. These can be analyzed and understood in terms of how ELF users "do things with words" (Austin 1975), because "the meaning of an utterance (as distinct […] from a sentence) is contextually dependent. Words in use can only be understood in terms of what we do with them" (Widdowson 2004, 37). It is therefore crucial to speculate on the pretexts ELF users may have when writing their postings, as well as to observe how their interlocutors act upon such postings, to understand what communicative goals are achieved. The online meaning-making process can be understood by third persons not directly involved in the interactions, provided that these third persons understand the context which underlies such interactions. This understanding will quite obviously only be partial, as not all contextual features will be accessible, and interpretation is always likely to be only an approximation. In particular, it is the objective of this project to understand and explain how the multicultural context acts on the language code via the computer medium and gives rise to CMELF discourse, and how this relates to the physical context in which informants live. In fact, while living close to my informants I did have the opportunity to take field notes on aspects of the structure of the physical setting, that is, the physical context often referred to in many of their computer-mediated utterances. These notes were key to understanding my informants' CMELF discourse, "for it is only when the linguistic features of the text are related to contextual factors that discourse is realized" (Widdowson 2004, 53), and "in order to understand an utterance, we not only have to assign sense to words, but also assign reference" (Thomas 1995, 9). The importance of referring expressions is acknowledged in the literature on discourse analysis and speech act theory: "Referring expressions point to particular things; they answer the questions 'Who?', 'What?' 'Which?' It is by their function, not always by their surface grammatical form or the manner of performing their function, that referring expressions are to be known" (Searle 1969, 27). Since ELF cannot be conceived of as a variety of English in which words are "keyed into their culturally specific schematic world" (Widdowson 2004, 43), there can only be mutual understanding if the code is adapted to suit the specific multicultural

context at hand. As pointed out by Seidlhofer, ELF is "characterized by continuously negotiated, hybrid ways of speaking" (2011, 4), and hybridity is not only manifest in spoken ELF, but in CMELF too. The hybridization process in multicultural communication via ELF can therefore be conceived of in terms of "the ways in which forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices" (Rowe and Schelling 1991, 231). As will be shown in the following sections, this project aims to find out what speech acts are produced by ELF users when they interact online, and how the combination of verbal and non-verbal signs is functionally motivated by the need to achieve their communicative goals in a computer-mediated, multicultural environment.

3. Understanding CMELF interactions in multicultural hybrid communities

The project has been carried out with two main research questions (RQs) in mind: (RQ-1) What kinds of speech act are performed via ELF in multicultural HCs?; and (RQ-2) How do members of multicultural HCs integrate verbal and non-verbal aspects of CMC into their speech acts?

Members of HCs exploit the potential of Facebook to achieve their communicative goals via ELF; for instance, the postings produced by ELF users on a multicultural Facebook group may serve to "perform *illocutionary acts* such as informing, ordering, warning" (Austin 1975, 109), to ask for information and seek advice so as to be helped by other members of the HC in solving their everyday life problems. According to Locher,

> in recent decades, the Internet has been adopted by professionals and non-professionals alike for imparting knowledge, support, and advice-giving. Advice can be studied on the level of speech acts (it is by no means restricted to the performative verb *advise*) and on the level of activity (i.e. text type). (Locher 2013, 339; italics in the original)

Online interaction in the HC I am investigating took place in a Facebook group in which the majority of members do not speak German or only have a basic communicative competence in the language. Most of them are, however, proficient users of ELF; this motivated them to use ELF as the shared means of communication within their community. Non-verbal signs are used in CMELF texts to provide additional semantic cues, as well as to make it easier for the audience to identify the objects referred to in the physical place.

As far as the first RQ is concerned, the speech acts of advice-seeking and advice-giving appear to be rather frequent in the postings produced by members of the HC under investigation; the following thread of Facebook messages can be observed as an example of this. The thread is opened by a male user, aged 22, whose first language is Spanish, and for whom the alias "Pablo" has been chosen:

Excerpt 1

Pablo: Yo guys! wassup! i have a question, so if someone can answer will be soo cool... **how can i say the cleaning lady NOT to enter my room...never eveer!** i hate coming back and see that everything is not in the place and the windows open (and yeah, its cold outside buddys) and this happened two times...should i put a note in my door? or is too rude? help [Emoticon cry; author's data, bold added]

Pablo performs here a computer-mediated utterance whose core speech act is one of the "advice-seeking" kind. He opens his message by greeting his peers in an informal way to attract their attention. In particular, he chooses a greeting that may mark him as belonging to the native speakers' circle of Afro-Americans, although not being himself a member of this community. He specifies that he is going to ask a question which constitutes the core of the computer-mediated speech act of advice-seeking (in bold in the text extract above). It is interesting to witness the level of hybridity of this posting insofar as it looks more like a transcription of a spoken text, characterized by the use of unconventional spelling, rather than a traditional written one conforming to Standard English spelling norms. Punctuation is also used unconventionally: apostrophes for contracted verb forms are omitted (e.g., in the representative speech act "its cold outside"). As far as capitalization is concerned, we can observe that the first person singular (e.g., "i have a question") is not capitalized. Capitalization is not used in this posting according to the orthographic rules of Standard English; its use appears functionally motivated by the need to stress the importance of the content that has to be communicated. In this posting, it emphasizes the force of the speech act of advice-seeking (as well as the illocutionary force of prohibition which would be achieved in spoken language by means of prosody and, in this case, of loudness): "how can i say the cleaning lady NOT to enter my room...never eveer!". The doubling of vowels in "eveer" may also have a similar function, that of emphasizing the intended illocutionary effect of prohibition for the cleaning lady. Pablo also provides an explanation for why he needs advice by making reference to the context in his apartment, which must be similar to what other

residents in the dorm have experienced, thus writing the expositive computer-mediated speech act "i hate coming back and see that everything is not in the place and the windows open". In doing so, he does not only refer to a possible shared experience, he also makes reference to the broader context, that of the weather conditions by the time the message was posted: "and yeah, it's cold outside buddys". On the day the posting was written the average temperature in Vienna was 3°c, and by making an exophoric co-reference to the weather conditions Pablo is trying to recall a shared experience with other members of the group, which is why he makes a point of stating that he finds the windows being open so unpleasant. His making reference to a shared experience may therefore have been used as a rapport-building device. Rapport, however, is not only built by means of verbal signs. In fact, Pablo's posting also shows the use of the non-verbal sign [Emoticon cry] at the end of the computer-mediated utterance, which functions as an expressive speech act. This provides the reader with additional hints as to the tone of the message, and as to how much Pablo needs help, thus strengthening the effect of the core speech act of advice-seeking in the computer-mediated utterance.

The user who replies first (male, aged 19, first language Turkish, alias: "Daniel"), produces a computer-mediated speech act which has the illocutionary force of "advice-giving" but takes the form of the picture of a note in German stuck on his door saying: "Bitte keine Reinigung! Danke" ["No cleaning please! Thank you"]

This second posting exemplifies the degree of hybridity that computer-mediated ELF interactions can exhibit: In replying to Pablo's core speech act of advice-seeking performed by means of verbal signs, Daniel is performing the directive speech act of advice-giving by using a picture of a note depicting a sentence in German from the physical place. This takes us to RQ-2**:** How do members of multicultural HCs integrate verbal and non-verbal aspects of CMC into their speech acts?

Figure 2.1. Computer-mediated speech act of advice-giving by Daniel, Author's data.

As the speech act of advice-giving above has shown, verbal signs (belonging to the English language as well as to other languages in the shared repertoire of the HC members) and non-verbal signs (such as pictures and emoticons) may be integrated into ELF computer-mediated speech acts. We have seen how a picture may be used for making reference to objects in the physical place, as a linguistic economy device