

Introduction

English as a Lingua Franca: Theory and Practice

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1. English as a Lingua Franca: setting the scene

This issue of *Textus* aims to investigate diverse theoretical and practical perspectives on the use of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). In using English for international and intercultural communication, people from different lingua-cultural backgrounds appropriate the resources of the language and exploit its virtual meaning potential as required in different contexts and purposes. In so doing, users of ELF show themselves capable of effective communication without conforming to the forms of Standard English or native speakers' norms of usage. Since ELF users are from different lingua-cultural backgrounds, they quite naturally bring to their interactions assumptions based on the norms of usage and communicative behaviour of their own languages. Among other things, this issue of *Textus* seeks to examine what kind of problems arise when one set of native usage conventions makes contact with another via ELF, and how far potential conflicts are resolved in the achievement of mutual understanding. This is explored in a number of domain-specific contexts of particular but by no means restricted relevance to Italian settings. These include such varied contexts as the use of English in school environments, the academic discourse of lectures in 'English as a medium of instruction'; the online discourse of international business negotiations; the use of English for air traffic control and in Deaf communities, and the discourse of mediation in institutional contexts involving asymmetric interactions with migrants and refugees. In many of these cases, the resolution of possible conflicts and the mediation of meaning through English across lingua-cultural borders have obvious sociopolitical and ethical implications.

Given such implications, and the significance of ELF in general for sustaining effective interaction in today's globalized world, prominence is given in this issue of *Textus* to the investigation of the conditions for effective ELF communication: how participants in ELF interactions position themselves and how far they accommodate to the other, what strategies of meaning co-construction they use, and how they draw on the total linguistic resources at their disposal to get their meanings across. The ultimate aim is to open up this area of enquiry to critical debate so as to further a fuller understanding of ELF as a crucial dimension of today's international communication.

A basic assumption that underlies all the papers in this issue of *Textus*, and is fundamental to all ELF research, is that ELF is not some defective version of the native language but a use of linguistic resources in its own right. It is often supposed that because much of what ELF users produce does not conform to the rules of Standard English or the conventions of native speaker usage, it is really only learner English at various stages of interlanguage and therefore in varying degrees incompetent.

This view assumes that the contexts and purposes to which such norms apply are absolute and ignores the fact that they may not be relevant at all to other communicative contexts and purposes. It therefore ignores the evidence that ELF users, while 'incompetent' in reference to such prescribed norms, are nonetheless capable of achieving appropriate communicative outcomes on their own terms (Seidlhofer 2011).

A second assumption is that it is the influence of L1 that interferes with the acquisition and use of L2 English and needs to be countered and ultimately eliminated in one way or another. Against this, the papers here make no such assumption that communication is necessarily monolingual, that, on the contrary, people will draw on whatever linguistic resources they have at their disposal. In ELF the main resource is English, but users will naturally make reference, and have recourse to, their own familiar L1s as well. And here we come to an area of research of particular prominence in this issue of *Textus*. As mentioned earlier, ELF users will bring the knowledge of their own language to their interactions and this will naturally have an effect on the forms of English they use. Since these L1 influenced forms will not correspond across interactants,

they are potentially a cause of communicative problems. What is of interest from an ELF point of view is how such problems are strategically resolved. So the linguistic forms that derive from the L1 are modified by the users themselves in the communicative process, not primarily so as to conform to a prescribed norm of correctness but so as to interact more effectively. The hypothesis is that the participants in such interactions operate a transfer into ELF of their respective L1 semantic, syntactic and pragmatic structures informed by the different cognitive-experiential backgrounds underlying their native languages, cultures and societies (Guido 2008). Consequently, such a transfer of L1 structures also affects the grammaticalization processes that contribute to the development of ELF variation.

What this means is that ELF usage develops syntactic, semantic and pragmatic characteristics which need to be acknowledged as autonomous and endonormative variations, rather than to deviating and exonormative variants. Hence, the variable characteristics of ELF resulting from processes of L1→L2 transfer, should not be considered in terms of 'interlanguage errors' produced by language learners, or of 'code deviations' resulting from the way English is used by 'uneducated' speakers or by non-native speakers for limited functional purposes (such as business or institutional transactions), but rather as variations whose grammaticalized features are to be acknowledged as independent from English as a native language (ENL).

And yet, such a notion of ELF as a use of English in its own right independent from ENL still meets with strong resistance in research on global and international English (cf. Abbott and Wingard 1981; Brumfit 1982; Trudgill and Hannah 1982; Pennycook 1994; Firth 1996; Bhatia 1997; Knapp and Meierkord 2002). In fields of enquiry ranging from sociolinguistics and pragmatics to translation and L2- acquisition/teaching, the focus still seems to be on ELF as a formal variety to be compared with the standard language and so as something in need of standardization (cf. Crystal 2003). Only lately, however, following a number of innovative publications on the conceptualization of ELF by a small group of linguists (cf. Widdowson 1994, 1997; Jenkins 2000, 2007; Seidlhofer 2001, 2004, 2011; Mauranen 2005) has a new line of research on ELF as an independently functioning use of language begun to grow, grounded on the fact that since ELF variations do exist and are actually used in many circumstances of today's cross-cultural communication, such a reality must be acknowledged and

must represent an applied linguistics issue that needs thorough exploration and description in its own right.

Crucial to this line of enquiry is the notion of ELF as ‘language authentication’, which implies an appropriation of the English language according to its non-native users’ L1 parameters (Widdowson 1979: 163-72), and which justifies the case for the existence of ELF variability, depending on the particular groups of users from different lingua-cultural backgrounds who ‘authenticate’ English according to their own diverse native cognitive-semantic, syntactic, pragmatic and specialized-discourse parameters. Such a notion represents a challenge, on the one hand, to the view of ENL as the one and only ‘authentic variety of English’ to be used in every context of cross-cultural interaction and, on the other, to the widespread view of ELF as a unique and shared ‘international variety’ of English for efficient and economical communication in everyday interactions and specialized transactions – which is not expected to be ‘actively appropriated’ to the non-native speakers’ own lingua-cultural background, but rather to be ‘passively learnt’ by them as a ‘foreign language’ (as they do with ENL).

Obviously, when participants in a cross-cultural interaction use different forms, influenced by their L1, miscommunication may well occur. Yet, misunderstanding has been observed to be less frequent when the two participants’ native languages are typologically similar in their cognitive-semantic and syntactic structures (cf. Greenberg 1973) which, once transferred to the participants’ use of ELF, are not expected to cause serious divergences. In cases like this, the participants’ ELF variations have good probabilities of converging syntactically and of being cognitively shared in interaction because their grammatical and experiential features can be perceived by the participants as familiar and ‘unmarked’, thus facilitating communication (cf. Giles and Coupland 1991). Conversely, a ‘marked’ ELF interaction is usually informed by the participants’ typologically-different L1 constructions which come to be transferred to their respective ELF variations, thus making communication problematic (Guido 2012). Seen in this light, questions about whether an approximation to the ENL code would enhance success in cross-cultural communication, or whether a simplification of the ENL norms would lead to a shared ‘ELF core’, are bound to be challenged by a notion of ELF whose variations directly depend

on the influence of the speakers' L1-typologies with the structures of the English language that they use, which makes such variations converge or diverge from each other, thus undermining the 'myth of mutual intelligibility' (House 1999) in ELF interactions.

Yet, success or failure in ELF communication is not simply due to an L1→L2 transfer of a morpho-syntactic kind. In fact, it involves whole discourse dimensions with their socio-pragmatic implications. Indeed, phonological/phonetic and semantic variations and L1 cognitive and discursal peculiarities can trigger pragmatic misunderstanding. This is because a unique ELF pragmatics is just as much a myth as a unique ELF grammar. The papers here challenge the view of ELF pragmatics that accounts for cross-cultural pragmatic failure in the same way as interlanguage models account for errors by assessing them against native norms (cf. Thomas 1983; Kasper and Blum-Kulka 1993). ELF pragmatic behaviours, instead, are taken to be diverse because they are determined by the transfer into ELF of the speakers' diverse native pragmatic behaviours. To achieve 'mutual intelligibility', therefore, the participants in cross-cultural interaction need to be aware of the L1 informed variability of ELF. Such awareness can enhance successful communication, essential in the specialized domains of interaction of the kind illustrated in this volume.

2. ELF research in Italy

Over the last decade, Italy has witnessed a burgeoning field of research concerning English as a Lingua Franca explored in a number of specialized discourse domains, and grounded in the principles of the detachment of ELF from ENL grammar, and of the existence of more than one ELF (cf. Candlin and Gotti 2004; Cortese and Duszak 2005; Guido 2008; Provenzano 2008; Bhatia *et al.* 2011; Poppi 2012). This implies that Italian ELF studies also need to acknowledge the fact that ENL cannot represent the parameter against which the cognitive-semantic, syntactic, pragmatic and generic variations used by non-native speakers have to be assessed insofar as the acknowledged tenet is that ELF variations develop from L1→L2 transfer processes. This tenet has in fact brought into question whole areas of interlanguage research that so far have regarded such a view of ELF in terms of ENL approximation

justifying ‘interlanguage errors’ as well as ‘register deviations’. On these grounds, the Italian ELF research reported in the chapters of this issue of *Textus* shows evidence that non-native speakers’ specific uses of ELF may be perceived as more or less unfamiliar to another group of non-native speakers of ELF from a different L1 background. This sense of familiarity or of estrangement that an ELF user may feel towards another ELF user speaking a different ELF variation depends not only on the ‘availability’ in his/her native background knowledge of the semantic-syntactic features of the ELF spoken by his/her interlocutor, but also on the ‘accessibility’ to experiential/specialized concepts and pragmatic behaviour that are different from his/her own native ones.

In the studies reported in this issue, the awareness of such processes of L1 influence underlying ELF-use is therefore assumed to be crucial for the experts in charge of cross-cultural specialized interactions and, as such, responsible for the successful outcome of communication. This is evident in Maurizio Gotti’s paper, which examines the processes of pragmatic cooperation and meaning negotiation between university lecturers in charge of the interaction and international students from different linguacultural backgrounds, all of them non-native English speakers using their respective ELF variations to activate adaptive strategies of ‘self-regulation’, ‘self-repair’, ‘self-repetition’ and ‘utterance completion’ to facilitate each other’s understanding in the context of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) courses in Marketing and Tourism offered by an Italian University (Bergamo). The co-construction of understanding through ELF is then explored in Thomas Christiansen’s paper enquiring into the extent to which features of Jenkins’ (2000) English Lingua Franca Core (LFC) produced by Italian, German and Polish speakers, as opposed to features of the native British pronunciation, together with delivery features – such as speed, length of pauses and discernible words – can affect the mutual intelligibility and the assessment of ‘good’ pronunciation by a sample of learners from Italy, Albania and Germany. Again, mutual understanding, this time achieved by means of accommodation strategies through ELF, is the topic of the paper by Cinzia Spinzi and Mette Rudvin, explored in the context of mediated communication between migrants and institutional officers who, in the course of such ‘unequal encounters’, try to accommodate their respective

ELF variations to each other's native linguistic and pragmatic uses in order to facilitate mutual intelligibility – as evident from the analysis of data collected at Italian 'centres for the identification and repatriation of migrants' as part of the Italian Corpus of Mediation in the Public Sector (ICoMePs). Franca Poppi's paper also focuses on the cooperation through the use of ELF that characterizes the computer-mediated interactions between a number of Italian companies advertising local products and their prospective international customers. A corpus analysis of these companies' websites shows precisely the prevalence of the 'cooperative imperative', aimed at enhancing communication by adapting ELF to the receivers' pragmatic and cultural codes of behaviour, over the 'territorial imperative', aimed instead at the assertion of the companies' social and national identity. The air-traffic controllers' negotiation of their understanding of emerging operational traffic problems through their use of ELF represents the subject of the paper by Hugo Bowles, who applies a qualitative conversation analysis to a mini-corpus of 17 interactions between controllers, involving 'atypical' ELF structures of permission requests, opening and 'reason-for-call' sequences. A still unexplored perspective on ELF use is offered by Cynthia Kellett Bidoli, who investigates the international impact of ELF on Deaf communities' spoken and, more frequently, written interactions, thus enhancing global communication within international 'silent speech communities' as well. The educational contexts of ELF use in Italy represent the subject of the last four papers in this issue. Lucilla Lopriore focuses on a project based on a four-year longitudinal research carried out in six Italian primary classrooms where teachers were non-native English speakers and a growing number of school children came from migrant communities with different native lingua-cultural backgrounds. Transcribed protocols of classroom interaction show evidence of the use of ELF strategies of creative lexico-grammar innovation and code-switching aimed at facilitating intercultural communication. Paola Vettorel also introduces a project carried out in three primary schools, aimed at raising the awareness in young children in multicultural classes of the use of English as a Lingua Franca to facilitate intercultural communication not only in the out-of-school environment, but also in their exchanges with other parallel European classes. Enrico Grazzi, too, outlines the

importance of the cooperative use of ELF as a bridge between the multilingual reality of today's globalized society, where ELF serves intercultural communication, and the pedagogic dimension of ELT in high-school literature lessons. To this purpose, Grazzi proposes a creative-writing methodology which exploits the novel genre of 'fanfiction', which is developing as an Internet-mediated social network engaging international readers who love literary works into re-writing parts of them collaboratively by using English as a lingua franca. Finally, a constructive criticism to today's spreading use of English among monolingual academic communities of Italian lecturers and students in EMI courses – which implement the Ministerial guidelines of 'internationalization' – is raised in the paper by Sandra Campagna and Virginia Pulcini, who cast doubt on whether the English used in academic contexts where participants are all native Italian speakers can be actually considered as a genuine instance of 'authentic ELF', or not, since in such contexts there is neither a 'naturally-occurring' use of the English language, nor a real need for a 'lingua franca' to interact with each other.

In summary, this *Textus* issue upholds the view that ELF in intercultural communication is not to be referred to ENL and to its native speakers' lingua-cultural behaviour, because ELF inherently entails its users' activation of LI-transfer processes of language appropriation and authentication through which they develop not only an awareness of their own identity, thus avoiding the sense of estrangement that a foreign language and a foreign culture usually produces in non-native speakers, but also – when they interact in specialized situations of cross-cultural communication – an awareness of each other's identities, which are reflected in their different native linguistic structures and pragmatic strategies transferred to their respective ELF variations. This implies a view of ELF Pragmatics which is not to be confined to the native and culture-bound communicative uses of a particular community. As the papers in this issue demonstrate, any ELF-user with different native lingua-cultural backgrounds can appropriate and authenticate ELF as a means to express his/her own culture. This pragmatic view has been shown to be also true in specialized, transactional situations of ELF use which presupposes a communicative cooperation in the processes of meaning-achievement and interpretation that can no longer rely upon the ENL specialized-discourse conventions shared

by the international community of experts. In fact, ELF used in such contexts is grounded on a hybridization of different conventions of specialized discourses in different cultures aimed at making ELF users feel the same sense of familiarity that they would experience in using their respective native languages in specialized contexts.

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