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Pragmatic Strategies in Casual Multiparty ELF Conversations

The English language and its spread

Over the last century, English has generally been seen as a powerful language which in the race towards globalisation seems to push aside all other languages in its path. On its way to global status, however, the English language has undergone changes to some of its communicative characteristics, which are often seen as a loss. This may somehow be connected to the fact that, as Hung states: "The rise of English from an international language (one of several) to the first de facto 'world language' has taken place within the breathtakingly short space of the last 60 years or so"[1] – even though Kachru and Smith provocatively state that "[English] is by no means a universal language", first of all because only 25% of the earth's population uses English and secondly because "those who use English are the best educated and the most influential members of society".[2]

Globally, the English language has also been found to be functional and efficient in a large number of domains and has gained multiple identities. These identities are not only multicultural but also intercultural because they may imply interactions among and between Native Speakers (NSs) and Non-Native Speakers (NNSs), even though this well-known dyad, central to the issue of language ownership, might no longer prove to be relevant. The distinction was acceptable when English was spoken by a few people in the colonies and was rarely used to communicate among the locals themselves.[3] However, over the past few decades, the dichotomy has become difficult to support especially in some 'Outer Circle' countries where English is one local nativised language among others, and local speakers are bilingual, at least.[4] In this context the Native/Non-native dichotomy seems to stem from a prejudice, and for this reason Kirkpatrick finds it better to use the term 'nativised', instead: "By a nativised variety I mean a variety that has been influenced by the local cultures and languages of the people who have developed that particular variety".[5]

The contradictory situation of the English language was already well recognized in the last century. According to McArthur, the idiosyncrasy lies in the fact that it suffered both a centrifugal and a centripetal tendency:[6] centrifugal from a possible standard towards non-standard varieties and centripetal towards the achievement of a common standard, which scholars like Quirk, Widdowson and others recognised as early as the Seventies and Eighties.[7] Since then, the concept has been variously invoked by renowned English scholars, among others, McArthur and Crystal.[8] English is so widespread that sometimes its centrifugal varieties may prove to be mutually unintelligible and/or incomprehensible and an extra variety (a common standard, perhaps) is required to bridge the gap between two mutually unintelligible Englishes.

[1] Tony T.N. Hung, "How the Global Spread of English can Enrich rather than Engulf our Culture and Identity", *HKBU papers in Applied Language Studies*, 13 (2009), 41.

[2] Yamuna Kachru and Larry E. Smith, *Culture, Contexts and World Englishes* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 1.

[3] Hung, "Global Spread of English".

[4] Braj Kachru, "Standards, Codification and Sociolinguistic Realism: The English Language in the Outer Circle", in Randolph Quirk and Henry G. Widdowson, eds., *English in the World: Teaching and Learning the Language and Literatures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 11-30.

[5] Andy Kirkpatrick, *World Englishes: Implications for International Communication and English Language Teaching* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 7.

[6] Mikhail M. Bakhtin. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays,* trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 272.

[7] Randolph Quirk, "The English Language in a Global Context", in Quirk and Widdowson, eds., *English in the World*, 1-6; Randolph Quirk, "International Communication and the Concept of Nuclear English", in Cristopher Brumfit, ed., *English for International Communication* (Oxford and New York: Pergamon Press, 1982), 17.

[8] David Crystal, *English as a Global Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

The centrifugal tendency was considered both the cause and the result of the lack of homogeneity and of autonomous development. Similarly to many other languages and due to prolonged language contact, English is not homogeneous since it has incorporated, randomly and without specific order, features of many other languages, those languages it interacts with. This contact-induced blending causes hybridization of the language, which may be seen as strictly related to, and perhaps a consequence of, the fact that utterances made by NNSs of English or English as a Second Language (ESL) speakers, even when incorrect or semantically odd, manage surprisingly to convey the message and are, hence, not incomprehensible. This 'distorted' English may be seen as a convenient 'variety' of the language, since according to Firth it is successful because its users seem not to bother so much about rules and structures but focus rather on the message.[9] They create a kind of hybrid and/or fragmented language which radiates from a standard to many different kinds of sub-standards, which may prove not to be necessarily confusing.

According to Kachru & Smith, the English language includes three types of varieties: those used as primary languages; those used as additional languages in multilingual communities and those used for international communication.[10] There are, indeed, many examples that show how complicated and confusing the situation of English is. Put simply, it is definitely a world language but the more it becomes so, the more it varies.

McArthur, in his *The English Languages*, reported how some observers noted that without the bridge of another language (namely International Standard English) many Native Speakers of English could hardly understand each other.[11] The awareness of how difficult it is for Native Speakers of English to understand other NSs coming from different parts of the English speaking world is, of course, nothing new. In 1949, in fact, Wrenn described faulty communications in English pointing out two main internal forms: personal and standard when the standard was acquired.[12]

The rapid spread of English/es is unquestionably a key feature of our current times, however; English is being transformed into many semiotic systems and this may lead to the creation of non-shared linguistic conventions, hence to incomprehensibility as well as unintelligibility on the phonological level. The language may fail to fulfil its main function: that of communicating, both between natives of different varieties and in intercultural settings.

Studies on World Englishes, in particular, have recently increased, and interest in the spread of English has risen exponentially. Within this wide scope of study, particular attention has been given to the issue of mutual intelligibility and to the possible birth of a Continental variety of English, i.e. the birth of a European variety of English, and to its phonological[13] and lexico-grammatical features.[14] This possible variety is currently being called ELF Europe and is being studied in depth from various points of view. Most of the research has focused on form(s) and on the description of how removed this possible Continental variety is from standards. In my opinion, ELF studies should also be concerned with how it is

2003), 178; Tom McArthur, "Language Used as a Loaded Gun", *English Today*, 10.2 (1994), 12-13; Tom McArthur, *The Oxford Guide to World English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 432.

[9] Alan Firth quot. by Barry Newman in "Global Chatter: the Reality of 'Business English'", *The Wall Street Journal* (22 March 1995), later reprinted in *English Today*, 12.2 (1996), 16-20.

[10] Kachru and Smith, *Culture, Contexts and World Englishes*, 2.

[11] Tom McArthur, *The English Languages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[12] Leslie Charles Wrenn, *The English Language* (London: Methuen, 1949).

[13] Jennifer Jenkins, "(Un)pleasant? (Un)intelligible? ELF Speakers' Perceptions of Their Accents", in Anna Mauranen and Elina Ranta, eds., *English as a Lingua Franca: Studies and Findings* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 10-36; Jennifer Jenkins, *The Phonology of English as an International Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[14] Barbara Seidlhofer, "Giving VOICE to English as a Lingua Franca", in Roberta Facchinetti et al., eds., *From International to Local English – and Back Again* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010), 147-163; Barbara Seidlhofer, "Orientations in ELF Research: Form and Function", in Mauranen and Ranta, eds., *English as a Lingua Franca*, 37-59.

[15] Here, it is perhaps relevant to distinguish ELF and ELF Europe not because they are different and separate issues but because my analysis focuses on ELF Europe data and my findings thus refer to it specifically. Later in the article this difference is not always specified.

[16] Kachru and Smith, *Culture, Contexts and World Englishes*.

[17] David Abercrombie, *Elements of General Phonetics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 6.

[18] John Laver and Sandy Hutchenson, eds., *Communication in Face to Face Interaction* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), 12. It is perhaps worth remembering that floor-keeping skills, time-control, turn-taking and silence management are part of this third type of information.

[19] Otto Jespersen, *Essentials of English Grammar* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1933); Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson, *Politeness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Geoffrey Leech, *Principles of Pragmatics* (London: Longman,1983).

[20] Kachru and Smith list twelve important parameters "for a study of what being polite means in different cultures", these are: values, face, status, rank, role, power, age, sex, social distance, intimacy, kinship, group membership; see Kachru and Smith, *Culture, Contexts and World Englishes*, 42-46.

[21] Ibid., 54.

used as a means of interpersonal communication, how it manages pragmatically to narrow the distance between communities and/or cultures, what linguistic and cognitive strategies are at work and how unintelligibility and/or incomprehensibility are avoided or compensated for interactionally by the discourse participants.

The issue of (un)intelligibility is, not surprisingly, related to ELF and ELF Europe,[15] and more generally to language contact (as mentioned above). ELF contexts are intercultural contact contexts, and just as in every intercultural contact situation participants do not share social conventions and/or cultural concepts. Not only unintelligibility and incomprehensibility but also misinterpretation are probable pitfalls, just as they are in World English (WE) contexts, particularly during face to face interactions.

According to Kachru & Smith, in every interaction participants exchange three types of information.[16] The first two are conceptual information, i.e. the content, and what Abercrombie defined as indexical information.[17] For the purpose of this research we refer to the third type, defined by Laver & Hutcheson as interaction-management information, since it is this kind of information that allows participants to bring a conversation/interaction to a close, successfully.[18] What is also included in this third type of information is what is generally referred to as politeness, which is as crucial in ELF/contact contexts, as it is in any interaction, if not more. Every speech community has its own politeness rules and behaves accordingly.[19] Politeness rules are not innate, even though the need for them is evident. They are culture specific; they stem from cultural values and they are put into practice through language; they construe human relationships and social order.[20]

Even though every speaker, irrespective of the language s/he uses, is aware that there are non-linguistic rules governing interpersonal exchanges and uses them instinctively, s/he usually does not pay much conscious attention to them or to their fulfilment. When interactions occur in language contact situations, speakers seem to rely only or mostly on their linguistic competence. Yet, a common shared language does not guarantee a successful interaction; questions of mutual comprehensibility and interpretability and, thus, pragmatics come into play. This is particularly true, as said, for language contact contexts such as the World Englishes and the ELF ones;[21] because, as we have all known since Hymes highlighted it, a mere linguistic competence is not enough to carry out a successful interaction;[22] a solid pragmatic competence is necessary since additional meanings are brought to the interaction by cultural elements. In ELF contexts, pragmatic competence would seem even more crucial to help interactions flow smoothly than in non-ELF situations.

What I think it is crucial to investigate, is to what extent perfect mutual intelligibility and comprehensibility are necessary for interpretability, or understanding. So far not much research has been carried out on this question.

More specifically related to ELF and ELF in Europe, specifically in our case, what pragmatic skills can ELF speakers be seen to possess and use to accomplish their communicative goals of mutual interpretability? The interplay between intelligibility and pragmatics seems particularly interesting because of the singularity

of ELF contexts. Since speakers in ELF contexts are not using their own language (although it is now becoming more and more frequent to classify as ELF contexts also those in which English NSs are present among NNSs),[23] they have to wait for, and adapt to the actual situation, relying on the strategies they manage to deploy in that particular situation to accomplish their communicative goals.[24] In such contexts, as data seem to confirm, some underlying pragmatic competence comes into play to support speakers' actions when their, or their interlocutor's, linguistic competence seems insufficient i.e. when there is a possible danger of intelligibility. The reason why I think this be an interesting issue, worth observing and studying more in depth, is because in Language Learning Processes (LLPs), pragmatics is what is normally learned later and more slowly (rarely completely), while in ELF interactions it proves to be a fruitful and ready resource for ELF speakers to draw on alongside linguistic ones. Pragmatic rules for language are often non-systematically taught because they are generally perceived subconsciously (as stated previously) and NSs, in particular, are often unaware of them until they are broken.[25] Differences in pragmatics arise even when NNSs are highly proficient in L2. Furthermore, unlike grammatical errors, pragmatic ones are usually interpreted on a social/personal level rather than as outcomes of a faulty learning process; according to some scholars they may have various consequences: they may hinder good communication between speakers or make the speaker appear abrupt or brusque in social interactions, or rude or uncaring.[26] However, in ELF contexts different pragmatic rules may not be a hindrance; data and results show that some apparently underlying and intercultural pragmatic sensibility is a real resource that supports and complements possible linguistic weaknesses.

Intelligibility, pragmatics and ELF

Using a language implies variation or modulation at various levels, as sociolinguistic research has shown.[27] When the language used is not any of the participants' mother tongues, variation is quite predictably higher, and variation may lead to unintelligibility; however ethnographic research has demonstrated that interactive aims are fulfilled also when the language used by the participants is not linguistically correct or 'standard'.[28]

As far as English is concerned, research shows that NSs are often not intelligible to NNSs, NSs do not understand a wide range of English varieties any better than NNSs, and NNSs who understand Inner Circle speakers do not necessarily understand speakers of other varieties of English unless they are used to interacting with them for some reason. Hence, (un)intelligibility is not a problem specific to ELF.[29] However, unlike the case of native English speakers, who may use one widely intelligible variety when talking internationally and another, less widely intelligible variety, when talking intra-nationally or within their own speech community – for example within their family or group of friends or colleagues – in ELF communities, speakers do not have two varieties to choose between, there is only a single but

[22] Dell Hymes, "On Communicative Competence", in John Bernard Pride and Janet Holmes, eds., *Sociolinguistics*, (Baltimore, USA: Penguin Education, 1972), 269-293.

[23] Jennifer Jenkins, "Current Perspectives on Teaching World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca", *Tesol Quarterly*, 40.1 (2006), 157-181; Jennifer Jenkins, "The Spread of EIL: A Testing Time for Testers", *ELT Journal*, 60.1, (2006), 42-49; Luke Prodromou, "Is ELF a Variety of English?", *English Today*, 23.2 (2007), 47-53.

[24] For the role of ELF within intercultural communication see Hülmbauer, Böhringer, and Seidlhofer, "Introducing English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)", *Synergies Europe*, 3 (2008), 25-36.

[25] See Gabriel Kasper, "Can Pragmatic Competence Be Taught?", *NFLRC Network #6, University of Hawaii, Hawaii, Second Language Teaching & Curriculum Center* (1997); and Kenneth R. Rose and Gabriel Kasper, eds., *Pragmatics in Language Teaching* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[26] See Miyuki Takenoya, "Terms of Address"; Kent Lee, "Discourse Markers 'Well' and 'Oh'"; and Lynda Yates, "Comment-Response Mingle", all in Bardovi-Harlig and Mahan-Taylor, *Teaching Pragmatics*, <http://exchanges. state.gov/englishteaching/ resforteach/pragmatics.html>, 7 November 2012.

[27] Studies and research on diastratic, diatopic, diamesic varieties and variation support

this claim. They show that variation occurs within codified languages, i.e. despite codification speakers change their language to suit the communicative and social needs they have to fulfil.

[28] Beyza Björkman "Pragmatic Strategies in English as an Academic Lingua Franca: Ways of Achieving Communicative Effectiveness?", *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43 (2011), 950-964.

[29] Kachru and Smith, *Culture, Contexts and World Englishes*; Larry E. Smith, ed., *Discourse across Cultures: Strategies in World Englishes* (London: Prentice Hall, 1987); Larry E. Smith and John A. Bisazza, "The Comprehensibility of Three Varieties of English for College Students in Seven Countries", *Language Learning*, 32 (1982), 259-269.

[30] Kachru and Smith, *Cultures, Contexts and World Englishes,* 60.

[31] Anna Mauranen, "English as Lingua Franca: An Unknown Language?", in Giuseppina Cortese and Anna Duszak, eds., *Identity, Community, Discourse. English in Intercultural Settings* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 269-293; Barbara Seidlhofer, "Language Variation and Change: The Case of English as a Lingua Franca", in Katarzyna Dziubalska-Kolaczyk and Joanna Przedlacka, eds., *English Pronunciation Models: a Changing Scene* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 59-75.

[32] Cecil L. Nelson, *Intelligibility in World Englishes* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Cecil L. Nelson, "Intelligibility since

continuously changing variety; we could say that there is one variety made of countless varieties.

The opposition intra-/inter- national that is applied to English cannot be used as such for ELF, since there is neither one single nation nor one space to refer to.[30] However, it is possible to find some issues normally used to reflect upon mutual intelligibility within the World English paradigm, namely the proven ability of English speakers/users to move from one variety to another, which in ELF contexts may mean the ability to move effectively from one EFL to another. Indeed, ELF speakers continuously adapt to newly created language systems since, as we know, ELF is generated every time it is used; it is a new system every single time. Both the description of ELF as a fluid system and its placement between form and function are currently strongly debated key issues in ELF studies by Mauranen, Seidlhofer and others.[31]

Intelligibility is commonly and erroneously used as a synonym of comprehensibility and/or interpretability, and/or of understanding in general; in other words, that if what is said or written is considered intelligible it would mean that people have understood it. However, this is hardly always so. Early pioneering studies on intelligibility did focus mostly on pronunciation and with reference to English the attitude has always been that of considering mutually intelligible, and thus comprehensible and interpretable, only those varieties reasonably similar to the British standard, especially from a phonological point of view.[32] But, being intelligible does not simply equate with being comprehensible. Indeed, according to the Smith Framework for "Intelligibility" in the broad sense, i.e. the holistic language-in-use notion of understanding, there are three conceptual layers of complexity which need to be distinguished:[33] intelligibility, comprehensibility and interpretability. It is, in fact, possible for an utterance to be intelligible but not understood; it would be intelligible because the hearer would be able to recognize the words but not comprehensible or interpretable because the hearer might not be equipped to assign full semantic, denotative and connotative meaning or pragmatic intent to the words; for example, when interlocutors do not share cultural contexts. Understanding in general seems to imply, indeed, framing the utterance in the wider non-linguistic context, i.e. including the Firthian Context of Situation.[34] And if the context is not shared, it would be unlikely for the participants of an interaction to understand it fully, i.e. to interpret also its intended import, as well as its simple denotative or semantic meaning; they would recognize words only, i.e. what they hear would be recognizable and *intelligible*; they might understand the words on the semantic level, which would mean that what they hear is *comprehensible*. But, a receiver may not understand the sender's intent and reply accordingly, i.e. the utterance may not be correctly *interpreted* by the receiver. Interpretability is defined by Smith as "the meaning behind the word/utterance", i.e. it involves the higher, pragmatic level of understanding.[35]

Research on ELF shows, indeed, that intelligibility is not a problem.[36] This is perhaps because the recognition of the words is instinctively performed in every

interaction, irrespective of the variety used or of the correctness of the speech, since, for example, it is impossible also for NSs to reproduce exactly the same sound twice. Hearers are used to accommodating and integrating phonologically what they hear.

ELF Europe as a language system and object of analysis might be seen to entail the prejudicial assumption that there is, in fact, one single object of analysis; we are all well aware by now that this is not the case, since ELF, as a variety, is generated every single time it is used.[37] For this reason, it is an atypical linguistic system since it is the context that generates, modifies and makes it unique. This 'original context' is seldom repeatable; it is itself unique.

As mentioned, research on ELF has mainly focused on pronunciation and lexico-grammatical features and not much research has been systematically carried out on pragmatic issues.[38] Studies on the pragmatics of ELF are crucial, I believe, to tackle the form vs. function issue of ELF. Together with some of Prodromou's considerations on ELT, studies on its pragmatics may help to show to what extent ELF Europe for example, is a variety of English,[39] despite its currently lacking the fourth, cultural, dimension of true varieties suggested by Llamzon, According to him a new variety of English can be identifiable with reference to four essential sets of features: ecological, historical, sociolinguistic, and cultural. As far as the cultural dimension is concerned, he argues that "works by novelists, poets and playwrights have demonstrated that the English language can be used as a vehicle for the transmission of the cultural heritage of Third World countries. The appearance of this body of literary works signals that the transplanted tree has finally reached maturity, and is now beginning to blossom and fructify".[40]

However, we do find a number of studies in the 90s which investigated ELF settings with regard to pragmatics or discourse strategies. Among the earliest, we can refer to Alan Firth's work which showed how interactions were successful despite the occurrence of grammatical infelicities and pronunciation variants, because various strategies were at work.[41] Firth's research and findings are extremely important, even though it is perhaps worth highlighting that his corpus was made up of business conversations, where the professional need for successful communication probably led to successful business transactions. Hence, participants' motivation was perhaps higher than, for example, that of casual conversation participants. However, the strategies used by Firth's businessmen were those normally used by participants in interactions: the 'Let-it-pass' strategy where speakers avoid problematic situations by letting unclear items pass; the 'Make-it-normal' strategy where reformulation is used to restructure unusual usages; repair strategies were not found.

The business world was the context of another investigation carried out by Gramkow Andresen,[42] which confirmed Firth's outcomes: in ELF interactions, speakers focus on content more than they do on form and the conversational aim makes them exploit various compensating strategies and behave cooperatively.

An interest in research on the pragmatics of ELF has re-bloomed recently, however, thanks to several European projects such as, among others, VOICE

1969", *World Englishes*, 27.3-4 (2008), 297-308.

[33] Larry E. Smith, "Spread of English and Issues on Intelligibility", in Braj Kachru, ed., *The Other Tongue: English across Cultures* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 88.

[34] John R. Firth, "The Technique of Semantics", *Transactions of the Philological Society*, (1935), 36-72.

[35] Smith, "Spread of English and Issues on Intelligibility", 76.

[36] Anna Mauranen and Elina Ranta, eds., *English as a Lingua Franca*; Alessia Cogo, "Strategic Use and Perceptions of English as a Lingua Franca", *Poznań Studies in Contemporary Linguistics*, 46.3, (2010), 295-312, Alessia Cogo and Martin Dewey, "Efficiency in ELF Communication. From Pragmatic Motives to Lexico-grammatical Innovation", *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, 5.2 (2006), 59-94.

[37] Will Baker, "The Cultures of English as a Lingua Franca", *TESOL Quarterly*, 43.4 (2009), 567-592.

[38] Alessia Cogo, "Accommodating Differences in ELF Conversations: a Study of Pragmatic Strategies", in Mauranen and Ranta, eds., *English as a Lingua Franca*, 254-273; Cogo and Dewey, "Efficiency in ELF Communication".

[39] Prodromou, "Is ELF a Variety of English?", 47-53.

[40] Teodoro A. Llamzon, "Essential Features of New Varieties of English",

in Richard B. Noss, ed., *Varieties of English in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1983), 104.

[41] Alan Firth, "The Discursive Accomplishment of Normality: On Conversation Analysis and 'Lingua Franca' English", *Journal of Pragmatics*, 26.2 (1996), 237-259; Alan Firth, "'Lingua Franca' Negotiations: Towards an Interactional Approach", *World Englishes*, 9 (1990), 69-80.

[42] Karsten Gramkow Andresen, "Lingua Franca Discourse: an Investigation of the Use of English in an International Business Context", unpublished M.A. thesis (Aalborg, 1993), cit. in Beyza Björkman, "Pragmatic Strategies in English as an Academic Lingua Franca: Ways of Achieving Communicative Effectiveness?", *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43 (2011), 950-964.

[43] Juliane House, "Misunderstanding in Intercultural Communication: Interactions in English as a Lingua Franca and the Myth of Mutual Intelligibility", in Claus Gnutzmann, ed., *Teaching and Learning English as a Global Language* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1999), 151; see also Björkman, "Pragmatic Strategies in English".

[44] Cogo and Dewey, "Efficiency in ELF Communication"; see also Gabriele Kasper and Kenneth R. Rose, "Pragmatics and SLA", *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 19 (1999), 81-104; and Gabriele Kasper, "A Bilingual Perspective on Interlanguage Pragmatics",

(http://www.univie.ac.at/voice/) and ELFA (http://www.eng.helsinki.fi/elfa) and to scholars such as, Seidlhofer, Jenkins, Mauranen, Hülmbauer, Björkman and House.

In 1999 House, for example, proposed five performance criteria to achieve pragmatic fluency that can be used to analyse ELF pragmatically:

- Appropriate use of routine pragmatic phenomena such as discourse strategies;
- Ability to initiate topics and topic change, making use of appropriate routines;
- Ability to 'carry weight' in a conversation;
- Ability to show turn-taking, replying/responding;
- Appropriate rate of speech, types of filled and unfilled pauses, frequency and function of repairs.[43]

Analysing her data, House found that casual ELF conversations are, indeed, often successful and effective. Cogo and Dewey consider research in the pragmatics of ELF to start within the scope of the cross-cultural communication field of study and refer to the works by Kasper and Kasper and Rose – even though they underline how these studies are highly constrained by their setting, i.e. formal school settings, by the participants, namely learners, and by the research aim, that is shedding light on Second Language Acquisition (SLA).[44]

My understanding is that ELF cannot be analysed properly out of spontaneous settings. Simulations, formal settings and the like are useful to verify tools of analysis but cannot help in investigating the pragmatics of ELF, since it is a language system generated in and by the setting in which it is used. Indeed, studies in casual conversations partially contradict what Firth and others found in their research. Mauranen, Pitzl and Kaur, for instance, report high frequency of negotiation of meaning and relatively low frequency of the 'Let-it-pass' strategy, and consequently very few misunderstandings.[45]

For the purposes of this present study, the analysis of casual conversations conducted by Meierkord proves to be particularly interesting.[46] Unlike the above-mentioned studies, it focused on small-talk, a type of interaction in which motivation could be expected to be lower than in business encounters and therefore a weaker boost to the accomplishment of the interactional exchange. Contrary to common belief, what she found confirms ELF speakers' sound cooperative attitude in interactions.

For the sake of completeness, however, one must also mention some recent studies in ELF pragmatics whose results contradict those mentioned above. Their findings reveal instances of ineffectiveness in communication. Planken and Knapp reported fewer examples of safe-talk, and instances of misunderstandings, conversation disruption, and difficulties in being effective in a number of communicative functions, not to mention the occurrence of faulty cooperative forms of negotiation.[47] Björkman rightly reminds us, however, that the setting of Planken's study was a business students' simulation which was then compared against real business negotiations.[48]

In the next section, we shall be examining two casual, spontaneous, multi-party ELF conversations in an attempt to contribute some insights on the pragmatics of ELF in natural settings.

ELF and casual conversations

In 1975 Fillmore asserted that "[t]he language of face-to-face conversation is the basic and primary use of language, all others being best described in terms of their manner of deviation from that base".[49] Conversation is a kind of collaborative and, at times, intercultural behaviour.[50] Dialogues, and multi-logues, are linguistic modes which prove fundamental to an understanding of language and its uses, they in fact enable the process of the construction of texts in and around the existing differences between interlocutors to be highlighted.[51]

As Berger and Luckmann stated, the most important vehicle of reality maintenance is conversation;[52] and as Deborah Tannen later pointed out, each person's life is lived as a series of conversations.[53] As social individuals, indeed, we spend much of our lives interacting with other human beings. Interacting is not merely a mechanical turn-taking activity, nor is it the simple act of producing sounds and combining them into words and sentences with the decoding by the other participants. It is, rather, a meaning-making process, in which participants negotiate their meanings with each other.

The way speakers draw on linguistic resources – whether they be phonetic, grammatical, semantic or discoursal/pragmatic – to shape their own social identities is evident in conversations. It provides information about the context and is also influenced by the cultural context in which the communicative event is being performed. Interacting implies the shaping of a possible meaning. It is a semantic and pragmatic activity which concerns the explanation, the exhibition and the negotiation of one's own ideas and beliefs about the world, and of one's attitudes to others.

Meaning-making, negotiation and more generally identity exhibition are characterised by different conversational styles. A casual conversation can be defined as a private text, a type of text in which the 'interactional' function of language, in Brown and Yule's sense, is mainly performed.[54] It concerns the private or interpersonal sphere and it is not limited or hindered by necessarily fixed patterns. It also strengthens human bonds in so far as it is analogous to what Coupland terms 'small talk',[55] or even to Malinowski's "phatic communion".[56] It is a kind of conversation which implies talking for the sake of talking together; a kind of action which serves to initiate and maintain interpersonal ties between people brought together, perhaps, merely by a desire for companionship.

Casual conversation or 'ordinary conversation' has always been considered an interesting issue by scholars belonging to varied fields of study: "… the pervasiveness of spoken interaction in daily life has made it an interesting domain of study for researchers with backgrounds in ethnomethodology, sociolinguistics, philosophy,

in Joseph H. O' Mealy and Laura E. Lyons Language, eds., *Linguistics, and Leadership: Essays in Honor of Carol M. K. Eastman* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1998), 89-108.

[45] See Anna Mauranen, "Signalling and Preventing Misunderstanding in English as Lingua Franca Communication", *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 177 (2006), 123-150; Marie-Luise Pitzl, "Non-understanding in English as a Lingua Franca: Examples from a Business Context", *Vienna English Working Papers*, 14 (2005), 50-71; and Jagdish Kaur, "Pre-empting Problems of Understanding in ELF", in Mauranen and Ranta, eds., *English as a Lingua Franca*, 107-125.

[46] Christiane Meierkord, "Interpreting Successful Lingua Franca Interaction. An Analysis of Non-native-/Non-native Small Talk Conversations in English", in Karin Pittner and Anita Fetzer, eds., *Neuere Entwicklungen in Der Gesprächsforschung. Sonderausgabe Von Linguistic Online*, 5.1 (2000), <http://www.linguistik-online.de/1_00/index.html>, 13 May 2012.

[47] See Brigitte Planken, "Managing Rapport in Lingua Franca Sales Negotiations: a Comparison of Professional and Aspiring Negotiators", *English for Specific Purposes*, 24.4 (2005), 381-400; and Annelie Knapp, "Using English as a Lingua Franca for (Mis-)managing Conflict in an International University Context: An Example from a Course in Engineering", *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43 (2011), 978-990.

[48] Björkman, "Pragmatic Strategies".

[49] Charles Fillmore, "Pragmatics and the Description of Discourse", in Peter Cole, ed., *Radical Pragmatics* (New York: Academic Press, 1975), 143-166.

[50] Susan Eggins and Diana Slade, *Analysing Casual Conversation* (London: Cassell, 1997), 312.

[51] Gunter Kress, *Communication and Culture: An Introduction* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 1987), 15.

[52] Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday; London: Penguin, 1966), 172-173.

[53] Deborah Tannen, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), 13.

[54] Gillian Brown and George Yule, *Discourse Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), distinguish "transactional" and "interactional" meaning and functions.

[55] Justine Coupland, ed., *Small Talk* (Harlow: Longman, 2000).

[56] Bronisław Malinowski, "On Phatic Communion", in Adam Jaworski and Nikolas Coupland, eds., *The Discourse Reader,* (New York: Routledge, 1999 [1926]), 302-305.

[57] Eggins and Slade, *Analysing Casual Conversation,* 23.

structural-functional linguistics and social semiotics…".[57] Anthropologists focus on it because they consider it a practice through which sociocultural norms and values are expressed and rooted. Sociologists claim ordinary conversation offers "privileged data for studying how people make sense of everyday social life". Linguists recognize that conversation "tells us something about the nature of language as a *resource* for doing social life".[58]

However, its apparent triviality should not suggest that it is almost devoid of meaning. Contrary to popular beliefs, a casual conversation is a highly significant socio-cultural activity. It is, indeed, somewhat prescriptively structured and functionally motivated, since it relies on patterns of such elements as discourse markers, formulaic expressions, frequent collocations and/or adjacency pairs. It is also supported by the more widespread interpersonal needs which drive human beings to define continuously who they are and how they establish relations with others.

As mentioned above, the importance of casual conversation is also demonstrated by the interest many different branches of linguistics, semiotics and the social sciences in general have recently shown in it. For example, systemic-functional linguistics considers language mainly a matter of social semiotics and, consequently, sees conversations as a way of conducting one's social life; to use Halliday's functional framework, of the three metafunctions of his system, it is tenor which concerns us most, because of its focus on interpersonal values.[59] By highlighting the links between language and social life the functional-systemic approach supports the idea of conversation as a way of doing social life.

Micro-interactions of everyday life are viewed also by Critical Discourse Analysts as realizations of wider macro-social structures. Bakhtin provides a formidable framework for an understanding of the interrelationships between the macro-level of ideologies and the micro-level of conversation.[60] According to him, conversational meaning cannot be understood without reference to a larger discourse plane; no instance of language is original, it is always an activation of voices that have been heard and used before. All the above mentioned issues concur to corroborate the claim that casual conversations provide the best data for a solid description of the pragmatics of ELF and the effectiveness or key role of Conversation Analysis as a means of investigation.

For all these reasons, from the point of view of linguistics, casual conversation is a key site for the negotiation of some dimensions of our social identity, including gender, age-group, social class and speech community membership.[61]

The corpus

The corpus used for this author's general research project, from which two exchanges have been selected here, was purposely constructed and is made up of a total of 58 casual conversations. Gathering spontaneous conversation is an arduous task; unlike written texts, spoken ones are not easy to collect and dealing with casual conversations is even more difficult. Debates, speeches or other programmed oral

linguistic productions are, indeed, somehow more easily accessible and recordable because they are predictable, even though some features – such as gestures and facial and eye expressions – are lost in sound recording.

Recording everyday casual conversations is not easy, also since collecting natural spoken data while behaving in a morally correct manner towards the participants is tricky. Recording without previous consent is more effective but might be ethically dubious. It is, however, more effective because the actors in the communicative event are not anxious or nervous and are spontaneous rather than self-conscious; it also eliminates the so-called observer paradox. However, the problems with participants are not the only ones; there are also problems of reliability and fidelity. Deborah Tannen maintains that recordings destroy the very essence of talk, which is the fact that it usually disappears as soon as it is uttered.[62] Reliable recordings are difficult to achieve because people might move around in the discursive space while usually the equipment does not and/or, at times, the quality of the recording is lost, affecting pitch and tone.

Therefore, it was my decision not to tell the people beforehand that their conversations were going to be recorded. Recording devices were then placed in some friends' or acquaintances' apartments and offices, in various UK locations; one occupant in each site was asked to help. In all, three people were involved in each location to avoid possible problems with equipment. Fortunately, the recordings went smoothly and no help was needed.

The attempt was also to collect data as varied as possible, and for this reason apartments and offices in which the linguistic context could be considered representative were chosen. The flats and offices were occupied by mixed-language interactants; English NSs were not always present. All speakers were highly competent in English; none of them was a learner of English nor considered a poor English speaker, but were all considered to be at least at the 'independent' level, where variation and adaptation occurs normally.

Casual-conversations were recorded for 15 days, at the end of which period the people were informed about the recordings and were asked whether they wanted to listen to the tape before giving their permission for the recordings to be used.

The first step was to listen to the recordings and to transcribe them. What proved to be a hindrance was mainly the variability in the quality of sound in relation to the movements of the speakers. The second step was to analyse them from a pragmatic perspective. Nearly all the settings share some features, namely a variable number of participants and the triviality of the topics mostly related to everyday life or job problems.

What is presented below is a selection of two conversations chosen according to their degree of typicality within ELF, and the frequency and effectiveness of the linguistic strategies employed. Comparing casual conversations is demanding because they are unstructured events with few predictable items or situations, and for this reason it is extremely important to establish analytical criteria in compliance with the aim of the study.

[58] Ibid., 6-7.

[59] Michael A.K. Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning* (New York: Arnold, 1978), 142.

[60] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986).

[61] Eggins and Slade, *Analysing Casual Conversation*.

[62] Deborah Tannen, *Conversational Style* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1984), 35.

[63] Cogo, "Accommodating Differences in ELF Conversations".

[64] Howard Giles and Nickolas Coupland, *Language: Contexts and Consequences* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991).

[65] In the extracts, all names have been changed for privacy's sake, nor can details about where the conversation took place be provided. Conversations have been transcribed according to the system proposed in Paul Ten Have, *Doing Conversation Analysis. A Practical Guide*, (London, Sage, 1999).

The criteria chosen are not the only ones possible but, I believe, they succeed in convincingly describing the pragmatic attitude and competence of ELF speakers. One criterion is frequency which refers to the occurrence of a phenomenon across all the conversations, the other is effectiveness which concerns the degree of success of an interaction, i.e. the absence of communication breakdown and unintelligibility. I believe effectiveness in interactions should be one of the major focuses of pragmatic research in the domain of ELF.[63] For this reason, following Giles and Coupland, instances of how participants variously adapt or modulate their language to avoid unintelligibility and accomplish their communicative goals have been highlighted and analysed bearing in mind that, in the ELF domain adapting one's own language and style means also trying to narrow cultural distance.[64]

The first conversation shown below, TALKING ABOUT HOLIDAYS, shows the high cooperative attitude ELF speakers have – the goals seems to converge, all the speakers want to end the conversation successfully, their interactional purpose seems strong.[65]

1.   *TALKING ABOUT HOLIDAYS*
4 participants: Nuria – Spanish, Katia – Italian, Revekka – Greek, and Jane – British
Age 27 – 30 All females; SETTING: at Katia's home in the U.K. talking about holidays.
(1) J: I went to STA last Friday (.) er (.) ehm just to know (.) you know
(2)   just to start thinking about holidays
(3) K: Wow (.) already (.) but (.) er (.) prices are (.) our major problem is that we are **off**
(4) J: **off (.)** when everybody is
(5) K: Yeah, we're off when all the others are and in high season. And if we won't
(6)   book   well in advance (0.4) we don't get cheap flights or holiday packs
(7) R: **Escucha**, is not a problem of money only (.) er (.) ehm (0.7) is a problem of
(8)   crowd. You   never get places or rooms
(9) J: Yeah, escucha is true. I was talking to the girl at STA and she said that (0.3) budget
(10)   holidays =
(11) R: = **budget holidays?** =
(12) K: = **cheap holidays**
(13) J: ok (.) are not available after July. She can hardly find something for herself.
(14)   you understand? She usually book in December for her summer
(15)   holidays!!!
(16) R: Girls (.) I am lucky (.) I think (.)bah (.) in a sense (0.8) I go home (.) you
(17)   know(.) Greece (0.3)and not need to be elsewhere, to go anywhere (0.8) the
(18)   sea (.) our sea. My aunt has a house at the seaside and I go there
(19)   for some days (0.3) the sun (.) our wonderful sun (.) that's Greece (0.3) girls!!
(20) J: **Fuck (.).**lucky you love!! The best I get from my relatives is Yorkshire!!! I
(21)   have an uncle there (.) er (.) in Yorkshire (0.9) the best place in the world for
(22)   him!! He lives alone and doesn't want to go anywhere (.) awful place
(23)   Yorkshire(.)nothing good for your holidays (.) if not for being free
(24) K: I don't know yet (.) actually (.) I don't wanna go to Milan..=

(25) N: = **where your mum is**

(26) K: yeah (.) but is damp, hot, sticky and dirty (.).⌉

(27) N: The air is dirty I remember (.) puah!⌋

(28) K: yeah (0.7) I'd rather go to Marco's hometown, is not on the sea but just a 10

(29)　　minutes far (1.0)

(30) N: **Tu quieras** (.) oh (.) ehm (.) you want to spend some of your holidays with his

(31) mother (.) and his family? You must be crazy, **chica loca** (.) (laughter) you know them?

(32)　　Have you ever met them?

(33) K: They are nice (.) she is very fond of Elena. she loves

(34)　　looking after　　the baby

(35) N: mmmmm I not believe, mothers-in-law are hardly friendly (1.0) ehmmm

(36) J: Listen Nuria (.) she wants to start well with her (.) Why do you go on like this?

(37)　　Why do you make her worried or angry?er (.) for something,

(38)　　**a situation** she hasn't lived (.) yet..at least..you see..

(39) N: but (.)..but..I..it's for her… (laughter) **safety (.).**⌉

(40) J: **safety..yeah (.)** maybe she will (.) when she comes back she will tell us how nice and⌋

(41)　　wonderful and friendly they were (.) **erh (.)** or perhaps she will be desperate and

(42)　　will tell us how awful it was down there (0.9) she will be as mad as a

(43)　　hatter (.)

(44) R: Jane is right Nuria (.) just give her time..I (.) **er (.) ehm** I know is not easy (.) I

(45)　　tried with Jordi's family (.) I used to visit them and spend some time with

(46)　　them also (.) even some summer holidays (.).but she was awful (.) she

(47)　　(.) virtually told me off **all** (0.8) **time**⌉

(48) K: always ..did she! Unbelievable (.)⌋　　　　　⌉

(49) R: softly, gently in a sense but(.) sometimes she was so nasty (.)⌋

(50) K: = nasty? =

(51) J: = nasty? =

(52) N: = nasty? =

(53) R: = yeah, she once complained about the way I was brought up

(54) J: really ? =

(55) N: Don't(.)think it Jane! Ehi…Is not because she is Greek and is from the South (.).

(56) R: that was the last time (.)

(57) K: **it was the drop..ehm..er..ohu =**

(58) J: = **it was the straw that broke the camel's back** (.) you want to say, don't you?

(59) R: yeah (.) I not liked it at all (.) moaning about my mum!

(60) J: well done (.) but ….we don't know (.) yet

(61) R. ok we wait and see what happens

(62) K: Shhss I want to watch the news. they might say something about the Italian⌉

(63)　　strike (.)

(64) J: mahh (0.3) I don't think (0.8) look up on the Internet, better.

In this first conversation some instances of positive interactional behaviour can be highlighted. It can be analysed from an interactional point of view, i.e. verifying

66 Gene H. Lerner, "Notes on Overlap Management in Conversation: The Case of Delayed Completion", *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 53 (Spring 1989), 167-177; Harvey Sacks, Emanuel A. Schegloff and Gal Jefferson, "A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn-Taking for Conversation", *Language*, 50.4 part 1 (December 1974), 696-735.

67 Cogo and Dewey, "Efficiency in ELF Communication".

68 Bettina Heinz, "Backchannel Responses as Strategic Responses in Bilingual Speakers' Conversations", *Journal of Pragmatics*, 35.7 (July 2003), 1113-1142.

69 Steven Gross, "Intentionality and the Markedness Model in Literary Code-switching", *Journal of Pragmatics*, 32.9 (2000), 1283-1303; Carol Myers-Scotton, "Explaining the Role of Norms and Rationality in Code-switching", *Journal of Pragmatics*, 32.9 (2000), 1259-1271.

70 John J. Gumperz, *Discourse Strategies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

71 See Juliane House, "English as a Lingua Franca: a Threat to Multilingualism?", *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 7.4 (2003), 556-578.

72 See Jan Blommaert, "Commentary: a Sociolinguistics of Globalization", *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 7.4 (2003), 607-623; Li Wei, "The 'Why'

how the interaction flows, how interactional goals are accomplished; there are many instances of strategies which can be indicative of a supportive, cooperative and positive behaviour.

First of all, we have examples of utterance completions (ll. 3-4-5, 13-14, 24-25, 57-58), where speakers help each other by disclosing close attention to the interlocutor's discourse and a common interactional aim. As early research showed, completion is a key device to avoid overlapping and conversation disruption. All the same, it is also a strategic tool used to keep the floor, especially as delayed completion.[66] Utterance completions, moreover, do not fix a hierarchy in the exchange, i.e. there is no one role stronger than another; on the contrary they are examples of supportive behaviour.

Similar and perhaps even more supportive are the instances of latchings,[67] that is when a turn follows the other immediately, without pauses of any kind. Examples of this can be found in ll. 11, 12, 25, 50-53, 58 in which the participants seem to hurry the conversation and speed up the exchange to accomplish their final aim.

As in nearly every conversation between equals, overlaps are a frequent occurrence and this conversation typically displays this feature. Far from being examples of disrespect, overlaps indicate an interest in the conversation and a will to keep its pace up vigorously; examples of overlaps are in ll. 3-4, 19-20, 26-27, 39-40, 48-49, 61-62.

Equally pervasive are the instances of backchannelling, verbal and non-verbal responses that appear to be a universal behaviour in conversations, even though sometimes specific backchannel behaviours are particular to language and culture.[68] Examples of 'mmmm', 'yeah', 'right', 'wow', together with head nods and smiles that are not displayed in the transcription, are clear examples of the speakers' intentions and of a balanced setting. Despite their low semantic value, backchannels play a double role, on the one hand encouraging speakers to go on talking, and on the other supporting the efficiency of the communicative action.

In this conversation other strategies and phenomena can also be retrieved. There are three examples of code-switching (ll. 7, 9, 30, 31). The role and value of code-switching in ELF is still debated; code-switching in ELF is not only an instance of the bilingual or multilingual competence of the speakers,[69] nor a way to adapt to the situation[70] or an identity index/marker within a neutral setting, as stated by House.[71] In the domain of ELF studies, scholars like Blommaert consider code-switching just one of its features and others like Wei maintain that code-switching is a strategy used to bring new meanings about.[72] What code-switching is definitely not, I believe, is a sign of poor language competence. In the conversation shown above, the speakers are highly competent in English and the examples of code-switching concern simple and frequent lexical items which would not justify the choice of another language. In one instance (l. 9) there is an accommodative behaviour when British English Native-Speaker speaker J. uses Spanish <escucha> to accommodate to R. who had just previously (l.7) used it. Interestingly enough, R. herself is Greek, not Spanish. So they are both perhaps humorously accomodating

to N. ? Jane, also possibly displays a further case of accomodative code-mixing, (in l. 64) when she says 'mahh' (a very Italian-like expression of doubt), and then seems to produce a slightly foreigner-speak utterance: 'look up on the Internet (.) better'.

There are two further behaviours worth noticing: ll. 11 and 12 provide an example of clear cooperative interactional behaviour. K. understands R.'s confusion, envisages a possible breakdown and pre-empts a possible problem changing the 'budget holidays' to 'cheap holidays' to let the conversation flow smoothly. The last noteworthy example of negotiation of meaning is what happens in lines 57 and 58, when K. seems willing to use an idiom and struggles with its possible translation. J. helps her and latches with the correct English idiom asking for a backchannel overtly with a question tag: 'don't you?'. The attitude of speaker J., the NS, is clearly cooperative; and both speakers have the same interactional conversational goal.

The second conversation we shall look at here, also takes place in the UK, though not in a home setting, and also has one NS participant.

2. NEW ZEALAND

4 participants: Zaira – Dutch-Malaysian, Ulrike – German, Cristina – Italian, and Rob – British. age: 28-30, setting: a U.K. University department office during coffee break.

(1) U: wow. I'm **dead** (.) I was at the Post Office all day trying to send this bloody

(2)   parcel to my aunt in New Zealand? Aargh (*scream*) =

(3) C: = **dead** poor you (.)I know exactly how you feel =

(4) R: = yeah …you have an aunt in New Zealand? is German?

(5) U: ehm yeah sort of (.) she was born in Germany but moved to New Zealand

(6)   when she was fifteen

(7) Z: Oh Oh er (.) ehm the old continent goes to the newest one (*laughter*) New

(8)   Zealand (.) I went to University in New Zealand

(9) U: so (.) ehm maybe you can help me (0.8) The nice lady at the Post Office wants

(10)   a code, a special number (.) an ID for the Post Office in New Zealand

(11)   I want to send the parcel to (.) But I haven't a clue of where I can find this,

(12)   it's red tape stuff.

(13) Z: I know (.) gosh if I know (.) I can ask my mum, for the code (.) I mean

(14)   (*Ulrike goes back to work*)

(15) Z: uff I am happy to help, but if she behave like she did (.) =

(16) R: = **what you mean** =

(17) Z: = **I mean** (.) ehm (.) it is not the first time she asks me things about New Zealand (.)Last

(18)   Christmas she wanted to go to visit her relatives and asked

(19)   my help for transport (.) and (.)

(20) R: and what else?

(21) Z: er (.) yeah (.) then (.) well (.) nothing in particular (.) **but** (.)

(22) R: but (.) but

(23) Z: I felt she wanted …. more, 'cos she asked for very specific things

(24)   like buying tickets sending them over to her (.).=

and 'How' Questions in the Analysis of Conversational Code-switching", in Peter Auer, ed., *Code-switching in Conversation* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 156-179.

(25) R: = What else (.) what did she ask for (.)

(26) Z: ok then (.).er (.).ehm (.) well..you know my sister was living there, don't you?

(27) R: yeah I know I know

(28) Z: ok (.) ehm (.) I had tried to go and visit her since I came here (.) unfortunately

(29)   I could not..flight prices, availability and so on (.) Ulrike knew and (.)

(30) R: and..

(31) Z: and perhaps (.) she expects me to ask my sister to help her or to welcome

(32)   her at her place (.) I didn't (.) and she was (0.8) I felt (.) I thought (.)upset

(33) R: right but that's your own feeling. <Has she told you anything about it? >

(34) Z: No, actually she hasn't but she is still ehm not so friendly

(35)   with   me (.) since (.) then. When she invite people she not ask

(36)   me to join   them (.)or (.) when my brother is here she ignore him (.)

(37)   (.) Him enters the room

(38)   and she is watching tv, she doesn't say hello (.) nothing!!

(39) R: But (.) today she was (.)

(40) Z: (.) yeah she was friendly and cheerful (.) because she need me

(41) C: (laughter)

(42)   But don't *rise* your hackles now (.) it's her character, her personality

(43) Z: Listen don't tell me so (.) I am angry I smell a rat and expect problems (.).

(44) C: mah (.) who knows (.) what **can she asks** you, she might ask again to be helped

(45)   for the accommodation (.) if she goes there or **she can ask** you to find this

(46)   number she is looking for.

(47) Z: yeah (0.8) who knows Or(.)you'll see she wanna ask me to tell my sister to go to the Post Office

(48)   and collect the parcel for her aunt..and no **terima kash** ?

(49) C: **Maybe** (.) I am not sure, I won't swear about it. She might back down on this (.) =

(50) Z: = **Maybe** (.) let' go back to work my LUV

(51) C: yeah

The general attitude of the participants to this conversation is cooperative and accommodating. There are examples of repetition (ll. 1-3, 16-17, 21-22, 44-47, and 49-50) which disclose a collaborative intent, a cautious behaviour which avoids possible interruptions of the conversations and an alignment with the other speakers.[73]

There are a number of latchings[74] (ll. 2, 3, 16, 17, 25, 50) which highlight the informality of the conversation and the setting. Even though we are in an office, the participants are on their coffee break and therefore their way of talking and interacting is diaphasically different from that which might occur in actual work situations.

There are backchannels (ll. 5, 21, 28, 33, 47, 51,) which stimulate the speakers to go on talking and, at the same time, guarantee efficiency. There is also one single example of code-switching (l.48) and it is nearly a closing utterance; anyway,

[73] Helena Kangasharju, "Alignment in Disagreement: Forming Oppositional Alliances in Committee Meetings", *Journal of Pragmatics*, 34.10 (2002), 1447-1471; Julia Lichtkoppler, "'Male. Male.' – 'Male?' – 'The sex is male.' – The role of Repetition in ELF Conversation", *Vienna English Working papers*, 16.2, (2007), 39-65.

[74] Latchings are indicated by = / equal signs.

[75] See Cogo, "Accommodating Differences in ELF Conversations"; and Emanuel A. Schegloff and Harvey Sacks, "Opening Up Closings,", *Semiotica*, 8.4 (1973), 289-327.

[76] Which in standard English would have been 'don't *raise* your hackles'.

following Cogo and Schegloff & Sacks, we might say that the choice of code-switching in the final part of an interaction helps the speaker pragmatically to end the conversation.[75]

Unlike the previous conversation, the use of two idioms "don't' rise your hackles"[76] and "I smell a rat" (ll. 42, 43) does not lead to a necessarily supportive and collaborative stance even though they don't cause a breakdown in the interaction, a 'Let-it-pass' strategy seems to be used, here too. Still, the first idiom is recognized as such, i.e. comprehended and interpreted, despite its not-quite-correctness and triggers a similar linguistic behaviour, since Z. in l. 43 uses another idiom to answer C.'s intention in l. 42 and to accommodate to her.

As previously stated, the two conversations analysed above are only a selection from a wider corpus. Nevertheless, they provide, I believe, strong evidence of these ELF speakers' attitudes in casual conversation. Their attitude is totally and systematically cooperative and supportive. Some pre-empting strategies can be noted and at least one single instance of the 'Let-it-pass' strategy. The success of the interactions is clearly the main aim for each speaker who engages in a negotiation of meaning to accomplish it. From the data, both those discussed here and those from other parts of the project, ELF speakers would seem to 'prefer' accommodating and supporting strategies. The specific characteristics of ELF conversations in this case seem to be the choice of safe topics, a fast conversation (latchings serve this aim) and backchannelling.

Interactants seem to follow some politeness rules that might be considered characteristic of ELF. Misunderstandings, conversation breakdown or slow paced conversation do not seem to be features of casual, spontaneous, informal EFL interactions, judging from my data. There are instances of them in some conversations but they are neither frequent and efficient nor typical, and therefore not meaningful as regards the fixed criteria, not to mention, some instances of self-repairs which highlight the positive and efficient attitude of ELF speakers. Some participants, indeed, repeat their statements or rephrase them to avoid misunderstandings and accomplish their communicative aim.

As far as intelligibility is concerned, it will always be an issue because it is strictly related to variation, since the more a language is removed from a shared 'standard' the more intelligibility and incomprehensibility is likely to fail. Our data show how ELF speakers do not seem to be frightened of being unintelligible or of being incomprehensible or of being misunderstood: idioms, code-switching, fast-pace, latchings are instances of confident linguistic behaviour. To refer back to Smith's framework, in an ELF context it might, indeed, prove more useful to distinguish the three layers of 'understanding' devised by the scholar and focus more on comprehensibility and interpretability. Intelligibility as such, i.e. the recognition of the words, seems unproblematic; the higher conversational aim seems to make EFL speakers focus on wider chunks of the utterances and neglect single words that are, at times, substituted by trouble-free foreign items in code-switching. ELF speakers prove to be efficient, top-rank speakers, perhaps because of their

intercultural competence, which turns out to be far more important than their linguistic/lexical/phonological competence.

As Kachru and Smith claim: "Inner Circle English speakers need as much cultural information and as much exposure to different varieties of English as do Outer Circle speakers if they are to increase their levels of intelligibility, comprehensibility, and interpretability of world Englishes",[77] and the same can surely be said for ELF speakers. Intelligibility is, then, not a problem solely of varieties 'other' than British or American English, it is an issue related to all contexts of which variation is a feature.

[77] Kachru and Smith, *Cultures, Contexts and World Englishes*, 69.

Conclusions and summary

The spread of the English language and its new role as a global language has raised, and continues to raise, several issues, mostly related to intelligibility. The birth and establishment of ELF, English as a Lingua Franca, in Europe, and elsewhere, is a phenomenon which is difficult to describe because, unlike all other language systems it is not codified nor can it be so easily, since it is generated, every time it is used, by the very context that generates it. Whether or not it can indeed be called a system, what can be asserted is that its role is not simply mono-functional. As time goes by it acquires more and more functions such as the interactional one, which proves to be a fundamental notion to identify ELF pragmatic significance/ strength. As a system, ELF is being currently studied and analysed thanks to various European projects and the research of several scholars, as specified earlier here. Earlier research has mainly focused on forms: lexico-grammar and phonology, even though studies in the pragmatics of ELF are growing.

As part of a larger research project, a small corpus of casual NNs-Ns multiparty conversations using ELF was examined for pragmatic clues. The aims of the research were, first of all, to disclose what strategies ELF speakers might choose and enact in their conversation, secondly, to describe what kind of interactional attitude the speakers disclose and, last but not least, to verify whether intelligibility plays a role in ELF conversations. From the data it seems clear that the ELF speakers depicted here (as well as in the other data not presented here) display a sound cooperative and supportive behaviour, that they use several pragmatic and discourse strategies to accomplish their interactional aims, and, furthermore, that intelligibility, in Smith's terms, is a not problem since they seem to focus on a higher level.

The need for further research into the pragmatics of ELF is evident, and my understanding is that it should be carried out within the World English paradigm as this will widen the scope of analysis for the study of language and variation and of language varieties in general.