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English Lingua Franca: Contexts, Strategies and International Relations

Papers from a conference held
at Ca' Foscari University of Venice
October 2011

edited by
Geraldine Ludbrook and David Newbold

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*English Lingua Franca: Contexts, Strategies and
International Relations. Papers from a conference
held at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. October 2011*

Edited by Geraldine Ludbrook and David Newbold

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Acknowledgements

This volume collects the papers delivered at the *Giornata di studio su inglese lingua franca* held at Ca' Foscari University of Venice on October 21st 2011. The full title of the study day was 'English Lingua Franca: Contexts, Strategies and International Relations,' since the event grew out of a research grant in the use of English in international contexts, made available by the university's fledgling School of International Relations. The results of this research are published in this volume.

The study day brought together a number of invited speakers: in the morning session, professional figures from the world of diplomacy and international organizations were asked for their insights into how English is used internationally; in the afternoon session, academics working on English as a lingua franca (ELF) in Italy presented research papers. This meeting between 'practitioners' (in actual fact, high ranking professionals whose expert use of English in international contexts is a crucial part of their job) and university researchers, working on topics ranging from the use of English in company websites to the teaching and testing of ELF, constituted one of the novelties of the event, offering multiple viewpoints on an emerging phenomenon and, perhaps, an opportunity for cross fertilization.

The organizers would like to thank the visiting speakers from the world of International Relations who so generously gave their time to share their experiences of how English is used today as a lingua franca: Ambassador Christopher Prentice, Prof Luca Pes, Dr Engelbert Ruoss, and Dr Federico Prato. We were particularly fortunate to have as our keynote speaker, Prof Barbara Seidlhofer, one of the foremost scholars of English as Lingua Franca (ELF), whose contribution continued beyond her opening address, as she stayed on throughout the day to handle questions, to listen to all the other contributions, and to offer her own feedback on some of them.

The study day, and the publication of this volume, were made possible by generous contributions from the Department of Linguistics and Comparative Cultural Studies and the School of International Relations and the support of the Heads of Department (Prof Flavio Gregori and Prof Anna Cardinaletti) and the Director of the School (Prof Rolf Petri).

Geraldine Ludbrook
David Newbold

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The invitation to the conference on English as a Lingua Franca held at Ca' Foscari in October 2011 opened my eyes to a new (to me) and exciting area of academic study. I was glad to share my impressions of the use of English in the world of diplomacy, including 'the power of holding the pen' from which British diplomats so often quietly benefit in multilateral negotiations. But beneath such superficial observations runs a deep vein of linguistic research, to which the Ca' Foscari conference has given strong impetus.

Christopher Prentice, CMG
HM Ambassador to the Italian Republic

Preface

On my way to the *Giornata di studio* ‘English Lingua Franca: Contexts, Strategies and International Relations’, I was reminded of one of the first conference presentations I gave about ELF (English as a Lingua Franca), at the ESSE (European Society for the Study of English) conference in 2000 in Helsinki, where I also announced my intention to create an empirical basis for research into English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) by compiling a corpus of spoken ELF interactions. My paper was received with encouraging signs of interest, but also with considerable scepticism: there was some shaking of heads, shrugging of shoulders, even laughter. But what I remember most vividly is a group of enthusiastic university teachers sitting at the very front of the auditorium – they were all from Italy, perhaps even including colleagues from Venice. After the session, they congratulated me on the ideas presented in my talk and said that they did not regard them as outlandish at all, but felt that there was an urgent need to take account of what was, after all, the most widespread use of English worldwide.

Since these early days, the kind of interest and enthusiasm shown by those Italian academics has spread and the study of ELF has gathered a good deal of momentum. It has developed into a dynamic and productive field of enquiry, widely recognised as an area of sociolinguistic research with significant implications for English language education and for an understanding of how the language is appropriated and used as an international means of communication in a globalized world. The study of ELF has now yielded a fast-growing body of publications, has its own journal, and a series of annual international conferences dedicated to it – the next of which is also to be in an Italian context, in Rome.

The warm feelings generated by remembering the early ELF supporters from Italy were confirmed and added to when I read through the programme of the Ca’ Foscari *Giornata di studio*. It stimulated my intellectual appetite. The menu promised quite a feast of ELF, with several talks offering different perspectives, from diplomacy and international relations in the morning to an impressive line-up of papers in the afternoon about research carried out at a number of Italian universities on aspects of ELF use in various contexts. I looked forward to enjoying all this varied fare. I was not disappointed.

And then the location provided its own symbolism. There we were, in the beautiful historical setting of the Auditorium Santa Margherita, in a former church constructed in the 17th century, merging past, present and future: we were engaging with new, 21st century conceptual approaches to an unprecedented global phenomenon arising in response to a problem that has been familiar – in kind, if not in degree – since the story of the Tower of Babel.

What seemed so particularly appropriate to me while listening to the varied presentations and the lively discussions they provoked was that these were hosted by Ca’ Foscari, one of the founding partners of Venice International University (VIU), a consortium spanning three continents. Ca’ Foscari is a place where ELF is both practised and researched: the exchange of ideas and knowledge through study and research in the international context of VIU is made possible primarily via

the constantly negotiated, flexible use of English as a lingua franca, by teachers and students from different linguacultural backgrounds co-constructing understanding and shaping their means of communication in contextually appropriate ways. These processes of negotiation and appropriation were enacted and exemplified during the *Giornata di studio* itself, and are vividly described and analysed in the papers collected in this volume. The organizers of the conference and editors of the book are to be congratulated on the contribution they have made to the continuing exploration of ELF and its significance.

Barbara Seidlhofer
University of Vienna

Introduction

Laguna Franca: the context of a conference

David Newbold

1 ELF – an emerging reality

English is now firmly established as the world's lingua franca. There is doubt about the number of speakers (2 billion, according to Crystal 2008, an estimate which has been called 'conservative'¹), and their identity (are native speakers to be included if they are interacting with non-native speakers?). But the importance of the phenomenon, and its rapid development as a field of research, are not in doubt. This fact is testified by a succession of recent full-length studies bearing the phrase *English as a Lingua Franca* in the title (e.g. Jenkins 2007, Prodromou 2008, Mauranen and Ranta 2009, Seidlhofer 2011), as well as by the controversies it has generated, which range from the fear that English is causing or accelerating the disappearance of other languages, to concern in academic circles that English may supplant national languages (especially in Europe) as the sole language for the publication of research. Other disputes are about the nature of ELF as form and/or function, the extent to which it can be described through corpora, and whether or not ELF should replace, or at least integrate, standard versions of the language in teaching syllabuses. The level of interest is reflected in publications such as *English Today* and *English Language Teaching Journal*, where the temperature of the debate continues to rise and may indeed be provoked and mediated by the publication, such as the *Point and Counterpoint* forum (ELTJ January 2012) which pits 'ELF sceptic' Colin Sowden against 'ELF promoter' Alessia Cogo on the topic of *English as a Lingua Franca: concepts, use, and implications*. In the most recent issue of the same publication (ELTJ July 2012) Neil Murray looks at pedagogical implications and argues in favour of pragmatic strategies to develop ELF skills in the language classroom; whereas in research reported in *English Today* (March 2012) Chloe Groom finds that most learners (in Switzerland, at least) do not want to be offered a non native speaker (NNS) model, and draws the conclusion that ELF 'currently neither motivates nor meets the aspirations of L2 English users in Europe.'

Although the present volume is not without its own lively contributions to the debate, such as Cimarosti's reminder not to forget the post-colonial perspective, and although it inevitably deals with issues related to teaching, and indeed testing, the primary intention of the study day was to reflect on the nature of ELF, and its role in international relations, and to provide a meeting point for an exchange of ideas between ELF users of very different backgrounds. In this sense Venice seemed a particularly appropriate venue.

2 Lingua franca in the Venetian Lagoon

Venice, principal port in the eastern Mediterranean from the time of the Crusades, must have been the home of many speakers of the so-called original 'lingua franca'. This was a Romance-based pidgin used primarily in commercial interactions between speakers of western languages and Arabic and Turkish speakers, and part of whose lexis was of Venetian origin. Today the Most Serene Republic is no more, the outgoing merchant fleets have been replaced by incoming cruise liners, and the lingua franca is English. Venice struggles to cater for 20 million visitors a year, making it one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world. Like English, the global dimension has created for it an identity crisis and an ownership problem. It is a world heritage site emptied of its inhabitants. Very few people actually live here (the past 20 years have seen a 25% drop in population, which now

¹ The University of Southampton Centre for Global Englishes, retrieved from <http://www.southampton.ac.uk/cge/>

stands at fewer than the 60,000 visitors it receives every day), but the empty houses are owned by people from all over the world. It is not an iconic Italy in the way that (say) Florence, Rome, or even Naples are. It has a past as an independent republic and a present which has been likened to a museum which belongs to the whole world (witness the many international foundations for the safeguarding of its monuments). As with English, multiple futures have been predicted for it, including rapid demise – Venice continues to sink², while Ostler (2010) sees English as the world's last lingua franca, destined to fall victim to machine translation before the end of the century. But most scenarios, for both English and the city of Venice, suggest a future shaped from outside; English, by its non-native speakers, Venice, by wealthy non-residents wishing to leave their mark on the city. (For an interesting article on the phenomenon see *La Repubblica* 31.7.2012).

Most tourists are of the hit-and-run type (Italian puts this more elegantly: *mordi e fuggi*) who come and go the same day, on the way to somewhere else, or accommodated on the mainland. They expect to use English although their interlocutors are no longer native Italian speakers; the waiters serving them in the overpriced restaurants are likely to be from Bangladesh or Moldavia, dozens of bars and souvenir shops are now owned by Chinese, and the bag sellers on the streets are from Senegal.

The importance of English is consolidated by its written presence, in advertising, shop signs, graffiti, and official notices – perhaps more than in other towns in Italy, and often not merely as translations of Italian, but as the only language on offer. At the time of writing (August 2012) these latter included a number of public signs and notices. The title of the Biennale Architecture exhibition is only in English: 'Common Ground'; this has spawned a protest event, with posters announcing a 'Common Battle Ground' – an interesting ELF coinage (standard English has *battlefield*). Many other exhibitions and cultural events have English-only titles. So do some municipal services: a passing minibus in Mestre bears the inscription 'Free woman project', a municipally funded social service intended to counter organized prostitution. Advertisements in English are everywhere, and they include plenty of puns, which range from the forced: 'Straight to the heART' (to get tourists to use a vaporetto which stops only at the most well-known museums and monuments), to the simple 'We glove you' (an accessories shop), to the idiomatic, and hence more opaque, 'Get carried away' on the side of buses taking tourists to and from Treviso airport.

Any public use of ELF can be seen as a statement; political, pragmatic, neutral, or personal. In the case of one resistant and highly visible piece of graffiti on the flyover where land meets lagoon, at the beginning of the road and rail link to the historic centre, the unknown writer seems to be making a statement about the ownership of English, as well as lamenting the end of a relationship:

Regina – still miss iù

This is not a misspelling, of course. *You* has been rejected for *iù* to adapt an English pronunciation to an Italian spelling system and neatly and ironically underlines the inefficient (or 'non phonetic') nature of English spelling, which, in its standard British form, has to represent 44 phonemes with only 26 letters. It is a form of written accommodation which parallels the strategies adopted by successful speakers of ELF. This is the last written notice any visitor to Venice will see before leaving the mainland by road and beginning the three and half kilometer journey across the causeway. Given the difficulty of access, it is likely to remain there for a long time into the future.

3 International organizations in Venice, and beyond

By virtue of its history and status Venice is the home to a number of international organizations, such as UNESCO, and international commissions, such as the European Commission for Democracy through Law. It has an international higher educational institution, Venice International University, and a large consular corps which is a legacy of the town's past as an independent republic. International

² reported by the BBC 22/3/2012 and retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-17445936>

relations are part of the daily routine for all of these institutions, and it was our intention for the ELF study day to invite representatives from different contexts such as these (from Venice or elsewhere) to contribute to the forum of ‘professional’ ELF users. We were interested in the way they used English in their professional lives, the attitudes towards this use generated in them and their interlocutors, and their own insights into and reflections on the suitability of English as a lingua franca. Each invited speaker was given a list of questions, and told that they could, if they wished, address them:

- 1 How much do you use English in your daily professional life, and who with?
- 2 Would you describe English as the ‘lingua franca’ of your working environment?
- 3 Do you think English is a suitable ‘lingua franca’? Why (not)?
- 4 Is being a native speaker, or a non-native speaker, a help or a hindrance to international communication?
- 5 Have you noticed changes in recent years in the role and status of English as lingua franca?
- 6 What mixture of enthusiasm, resignation or hostility to the use of English have you noticed?
- 7 Is there any advice you would give to users of English in an international context?
- 8 Does the world need a lingua franca?

The invited speakers were the British Ambassador to Italy, Christopher Prentice; the Director of the Venice Office of UNESCO, Engelbert Ruoss; the Director of the School of Humanities at Venice International University Luca Pes; and the Legal Advisor to the Italian Permanent Commission at the United Nations in Vienna, Federico Prato. All of them accepted the invitation. One of the four (unsurprisingly, the British ambassador) was a native speaker of English; the remaining three were non native speakers, which approximately reflected the worldwide proportion of native speakers to non native speakers, and provided a useful reminder to those present that native speakers of English today are in a small minority.

4 Keynote address: what is this thing called ELF?

The study day began with an examination of the concept of ELF, in a keynote address which brought the theme sharply into focus, and offered a theoretical basis which would shed light on the following contributions by the ‘practitioners’. Given by Barbara Seidlhofer of the University of Vienna, it offered a reflection on the nature of ELF, which occupies a ‘sort of in between’ zone between the standard dictionary definitions of the ‘language of Britain and its inhabitants’ and ‘the world’s most widely used second language’. This point was effortlessly made by referring to those people present (native and non native speakers) and the language they were using: ‘not localized Englishes used internationally but globalized English as an International Language’. ELF, Seidlhofer stressed, poses a problem of conceptualization, and that conceptualization is a functional, not a formal one. And this in turn requires us to develop ‘unprecedented ways of thinking about the language’, and thus to challenge conventional notions, such as what a ‘legitimate’ language is, who a ‘legitimate’ speaker is, and what is meant by ‘competence’. As she put it, ‘We don’t even know what native speaker competence is ... and now the question gets even more complicated’, such as in the language/culture interface in ELF interaction.

Moving on to the need for a corpus to be able to describe the phenomenon, Seidlhofer first highlighted the anomaly that although there are vast corpora for other types of English – as a native language, as a second language, and as a foreign or learner’s language – ‘until recently there was nothing for ELF although ELF had been the most widespread use for years.’ Seidlhofer is responsible for the Vienna Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE), which amounts to more than a million words of spoken ELF interaction. The main findings to emerge from this corpus amount to a list of strategies, such as exploitation of grammatical redundancy, creation of new words and idioms, co-construction of meaning, and accommodation strategies, these latter being a key process in any successful ELF interaction: ‘you adjust to your interlocutors – that’s expert ELF communication.’

What the corpus does NOT provide evidence of is of people becoming ‘little Englanders’ by trying to ape native speaker norms of correctness and conformity: ‘the focus is always on content and people’, as she pointed out.

Shortage of space prevents a more complete account here of the keynote presentation. Suffice it to say that the VOICE corpus is freely accessible on line³, while Seidlhofer’s most recent thinking on the ELF phenomenon can be found in her (2011) publication *Understanding English as a Lingua Franca*. To illustrate the crucial role of understanding, but also at the same time to show how young people see ELF, she quoted (from the VOICE corpus) a Bulgarian ELF user who comments, with a disarming display of common sense, ‘I think the most important thing is to have a certain level of understanding. Let the British speak their British English, let Americans speak their English and let us speak our English in which we have a certain level of understanding.’ This idea was taken up in later contributions, most notably in that of Englebert Rouss, who reminded the audience of the importance of listening; speaking is never enough.

5 The view from diplomacy and international organizations

Following the keynote address, the rest of the morning was taken up by insights into the reality of ELF in international contexts, and in particular the formal contexts of international relations, by the ‘practitioners’. The insights of the first speaker, Christopher Prentice, both as a diplomat, and as a native speaker of English, were doubly useful. After reminding the audience that most mother tongue speakers themselves use non standard forms, he then considered the British attitude to non native speakers, suggesting that this is normally one of tolerance; when faced with a foreign speaker ‘we don’t take offence, we welcome it’; an attitude which he claimed may actually have contributed to the ease with which English (likened to a ‘positive virus’) has established itself internationally.

The ambassador gave a number of examples of how diplomacy and choice of language are linked, such as in the ongoing negotiation on European patents. For years, he pointed out, Europe has struggled to simplify the way in which patents are recorded. There are two contending proposals: to use three languages (French, German, and English) or just one (English). The Italian position is to use just one, since Italian is not one of the languages in the first option; the UK, for diplomatic reasons, has abstained from the debate, although, Prentice added, ‘we have in mind that eventually it will be English only.’ When it came to legal drafting of documents, though, he did not see English taking over completely: ‘We are caught half way between a lingua franca and the perfectly legitimate and proper use of multiple native languages. I don’t think we will ever get out of this half-way house of the politics of language, but we are getting very close to the universal use of English in almost all informal settings.’ Referring again to Europe, he cited examples of diplomats from Eastern European countries, most of whom have German as a second language, showing signs of restiveness or even resentment when, say, a French ambassador who is presiding a meeting insists on speaking French, concluding with the interesting comment that ‘in a long meeting if anybody is not speaking English it’s quite rare – that is my direct experience’; a notion which could be taken up as a new strand of ELF research: the idea that, in the end, the language of international meetings always settles down as English.

The second speaker was Luca Pes, Director of the Humanities Programme at the Venice International University (VIU), housed on the island of San Servolo in the middle of the Lagoon. After briefly outlining the global vision of this consortium of 11 universities from 3 continents, and the way in which the programme is negotiated by the partner universities, he went on to trace the history of the gradual acceptance of English as the official language, for teaching and testing, and in the administration.

³ http://www.univie.ac.at/voice/page/corpus_description

Back in 1995, when the VIU opened, there was opposition to the proposal from some partners that English should be the official language. Although there was ‘already an idea that English should be the official language of any international endeavour, especially among economists’, and economists were behind the opening of the institution, other faculties at Ca’ Foscari (one of the founding partners), and other universities, were not so happy. French universities which were contacted and were interested in joining eventually withdrew because they insisted on the freedom to use French as a teaching language. Today things are different. English is the uncontroversial official language on campus, although in the administrative area the decision was made to use some native speakers ‘because we don’t want misunderstandings’.

The key feature of student and teacher interaction, however, is flexibility, created out of necessity by the multicultural context. This is one aspect of the negotiation which is ‘crucial to the programme. Professors are as temporary as the students, so they need to negotiate the content of the course too. Negotiation is really at the centre of our activity and part of our educational mission.’ In conclusion Professor Pes linked this idea with Nadine Basso’s research project into ELF at the VIU, which is presented in this volume. At first, he said, students were surprised to find themselves ‘the object of a theory’ as they were actually only doing what came naturally to them. But it was useful for them to become aware ‘that there is a linguistic process in this negotiation which we regard only as cultural’.

Engelbert Ruoss, a scientist by background, was invited in his role as director of the Venice office of UNESCO. A lichenologist, he began by drawing a parallel between lichenology and human society. ‘Lichens are a combination of algae and fungi – they grow together and create something completely new without major exchange of genetic material (...); these beings can be a model of how society should live and work together’, a metaphor which perhaps could also be usefully extended to refer to ELF interaction.

Part of the UNESCO mission is to promote multilingualism and in particular to safeguard endangered languages. But in the day-to-day running of the organization, it uses two working languages: English, and French (the head office of UNESCO is in Paris). However, ‘we are moving towards having English as the main language to increase co-operation between various UN agencies, the majority of which do not have French as a second language’ But this English, Ruoss suggested, is a ‘kind of technical language’, based on a certain terminology and lots of acronyms. In other words, it is a code for insiders, which seems to be a long way from the ‘negotiation’ of ELF interaction at the VIU. Coming back to the idea, though, after reflecting on his own experience of languages (a native Swiss German speaker, he uses English and French at work and Italian mixed with English and Ladin at home), he underlined that English at UNESCO is ‘not Oxford English or US English – it’s a sort of mixture, a kind of agreement between different Englishes.’ Nonetheless he talked of the need for the prop provided by native speakers when finalizing his papers and presentations ‘although I think to be perfect [in the language] is not the most important thing.’

Dr Ruoss’s contribution concluded with a reflection on the importance of listening skills in linguistic interaction, and linked this to the idea of tolerance. In doing so he connected with points raised by both Seidlhofer and Prentice. ‘I think our main effort should be to listen, not only to hear but to understand. (...) Whatever we are talking about, we have to listen. Listening is not only connected to language, it’s also connected to understanding non-verbal communication, gestures, it’s listening to nature, to changes. We have to learn to be aware that communication starts always with listening and the highest level of communication is understanding.’

The final speaker of the morning was Federico Prato, legal advisor to the Italian UN mission in Vienna. He gave a detailed presentation of the workings of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, in particular the process of asset recovery following the illegal international transfer of funds. The aim was to show the nature of the international co-operation involved, most of which takes place in English, and thus give an idea of the level and complexity of the skills required of participants.

Before this presentation, he spoke of the use of English in the UN generally, how staff use English in their daily work, and when discussing with diplomats in informal meetings. Echoing the words of the

British ambassador, Prato recalled the French EU presidency in 2008, when French was the working language of European meetings ‘but I heard colleagues from north and east Europe complaining because they didn’t speak or understand French.’ As well as being the de facto lingua franca in informal meetings of diplomats ‘because in many member states English is the first or second official language or it is the only foreign language they know’, English is also the preferred language for negotiation ‘in the elaboration of preparatory texts as so-called terms of reference.’ In other words, it provides the original version of international documents, making it a sort of *primus inter pares* with the other five official languages of the UN. ‘The text is translated into the other five official languages and the consistency group composed by non linguistic experts (mainly lawyers) and linguistic experts verify that all texts have the same meaning. In pure legalistic terms the six texts are equal. However, the English text still keeps a higher value. This is because lawyers know that provisions have been negotiated and originally drafted in English and therefore they would prefer to refer to the English version.’

The morning session thus ended with a very different context of use from those of the spoken interactions recorded in the VOICE corpus or the VIU campus. Coming from different backgrounds and organizations, speakers had offered different sets of insights, as learners and users, towards native and non native varieties, and to the use and importance of ELF. But there is a vast common ground of agreement in what they had to say. What emerges most clearly is that on the international scene the role of English is predominant; and that this English, whatever it is (a ‘positive virus’, ‘negotiated’, ‘technical’, ‘an agreement’) is a tool for communication which is quite different from any native speaker version of the language; and that, in using the language, in both formal and informal contexts, *negotiation* is a fundamental requirement for successful communication.

6 The articles in this volume

The rest of this volume is taken up by the research papers in ELF presented in the afternoon session of the *Giornata di studio*. They cover a range of contexts, and especially the use of electronic media in which the gap between spoken and written forms of the language is getting closer (websites, facebook, blogs, and wikis). A very brief synopsis of the topics they cover follows.

In *Dealing with the Unexpected: the use of ELF in an international academic context* **Nadine Basso** reports the main findings from a year-long study of the uses of ELF at Venice International University, which included an analysis of 100 hours of recordings of class and out of class interaction, and questionnaires for which there were 43 respondents (31 students and 12 lecturers), focussing on communication problems and strategies, and attitudes towards English. Among the findings:

- NNS – NNS communication proved less problematic than NNS–NS interaction
- successful communication depended more on strategies than ‘linguistic means’
- American accents proved to be among the most difficult

This is the first piece of field research carried out by a pre-doctoral graduate student, as she tries to get to grips with a complex subject, and as such it contains plenty of interesting reflections on the ‘clash’ between NS and NNS, as for example NS complaining that NNS might be hard to understand because they chose to increase their delivery speed when speaking to them, which she identifies as part of the the NNS ‘language burden’. Particularly interesting is the presentation of the dynamic process of engaging with ELF observed over the semester, as students overcome fear and embarrassment to become successful ELF users.

The title of **Franca Poppi**’s paper *ELF and corporate identity: a case study focusing on companies’ websites* is self explanatory. Drawing on Cramer’s circles (Kachru’s inner, outer, and expanding

circles of English users revisited in a European context), she focuses on how companies attempt to create empathy with reader/consumers, for example in the use of pronouns *we* and *you*. She also singles out non-standard forms such as syntactic discontinuities, ‘deviant’ use of prepositions, and lexical borrowings, concluding that content accuracy is much more important than formal accuracy.

Valeria Franceschi’s paper *Participatory culture and the L2: attitudes and intelligibility of non native speech in fan-produced audiovisuals* looks at the comparatively recent phenomenon of fan-produced movies, amateur films based on figures and situations from pop culture, and uploaded onto YouTube or other hosting sites. In particular, she is interested in the accents of characters, which attract a lot of unsolicited negative comments (to put it mildly) on the Internet. The research explores two areas – attitudes to NNS accents, through questionnaires, and the phonological deviation of accents in two fan movie trailers. Although the data is limited, the findings on comprehensibility seem to connect with Jenkins’ (2000) distinction between core and non-core phonology.

In *Blogging Elfers* **Paola Vettorel** focuses on linguistic creativity in Internet blogs, especially blogs written by young Italians seeking to communicate with other Italians and internationally, and also simply to improve their English. As well as the creation of new words, e.g. by suffixation, she looks at supportive mechanisms adopted by bloggers to help each other, such as the flagging of dubious words and the collaborative co-construction of meaning, and the phenomenon of code-switching (in this case reverting to Italian) to assert cultural identity.

Enrico Grazzi reports on a language learning experiment in *English as a Lingua Franca and wikis as new affordances for the language classroom: the case of cooperative writing and fanfiction*. In this project involving teachers and high school students in Rome and Sicily, students share feedback via the Internet on books they have been invited to read by their English teachers, and then in a second phase, take part in rewriting tasks (such as rewriting the endings of short stories). The focus is on the learning process, and the communicative interaction in ELF between students from different schools using the Internet.

Roberta Cimarosti is also interested in language teaching, and especially the negative stereotypes created in some textbooks. In *Help for ELF: Contributions from the Ex-colonial World* she approaches language teaching from the discipline of post-colonial studies, showing how standard English may be entwined with notions of cultural hegemony in ELT materials, and warning that ELF apologists, although rejecting such materials, may themselves be too Euro-centred, and could benefit from taking into account the way in which lingua franca Englishes (LFEs, using the term favoured by Canagarajah) have developed in former colonies.

The three papers which end the volume are related. They describe a research project exploring the development of an entry test of English for European university students (TEEUS) which includes ELF elements, such as listening to NNS teachers and students. Minimum levels of English are now required by most European universities, to guarantee that students may successfully communicate in the ELF contexts which have become a feature of academic life in Europe (such as listening to visiting lecturers or interacting with Erasmus students). **David Newbold** describes the rationale behind the test, and reports on a needs analysis carried out at the Universities of Ca’ Foscari and Salento (Lecce); **Geraldine Ludbrook** tackles the fluid nature of ELF in her identification of the construct behind the test, as well as the spikey notion of authenticity, suggesting that the test offers ‘new kinds of test tasks’ achieving high degrees of situational authenticity, while the third member of the research group, **Maria Rees** examines issues relating to software, rubrics, and the use of web pages as part of the test, and in so doing offers a reflection on the rapid development of digital literacies, which (as we have seen in some of the preceding articles) provide fundamental tools for large numbers of ELF users.

7 Caveat: to ‘correct’ or not to ‘correct’?

This introduction ends with a caveat. It is becoming the norm for collections of papers on ELF (but also other disciplines) which include contributions by non-native speakers to inform readers that the volume has not been checked or edited by native speakers (e.g. Mauranen and Ranta 2009). This reflects not only the emerging reality and growing acceptance of ELF as an appropriate vehicle for research publications, but also perhaps, in the disclaimer, a certain distancing from a default native speaker variety (e.g. American or British). This volume contains no such disclaimer since, although most contributors are NNS, it has been edited by two NSs. Our policy has been to make those changes which we thought were oversights, or which the authors would have wanted us to change, such as subject-verb agreement, tenses, and plural markers, even when the meaning was not in any way compromised.

But we were more inclined to leave divergent (from standard English) lexis, or lexical innovation, especially when we felt that the intended meaning was not compromised, or may even have been enhanced. This was to some extent an arbitrary operation, but it is an illuminating one which cuts across both NS and NNS contributions; at times, ELF can provide a word for something which might leave the native speaker floundering. More importantly, lexical innovation involves an immediate response to a specific context, and is likely to be understood immediately by people sharing the same context, in this case, academics across Europe; and it is for these readers that this volume is primarily intended.

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