New Perspectives on English as a European Lingua Franca

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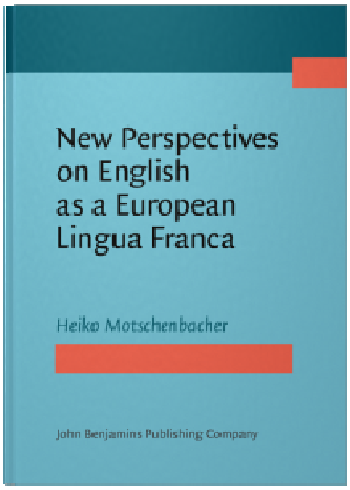

Reviewed by Paola Vettorel[1]

This volume focuses on English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) within a European perspective through an in-depth analysis of spoken data from a specific context, the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) press conferences. The corpus under analysis can be seen as complementary to other ELF corpora (VOICE[2], ELFA[3], and other smaller corpora, e.g. Cogo & Dewey), both in terms of context and participants.
In the brief introductory chapter the setting and analytical perspective are outlined, clarifying that in this work, in line with the most recent ELF research paradigm and a postmodernist view of English(es), European ELF is not to be seen as "an internally stable and homogeneous entity;" rather, the aim of the volume is "to explore European ELF as a hybrid, internally heterogeneous formation, even within one particular community of practice." (2)

Chapter 2, "Differing views on the status of English in Europe," starts with an excellent examination of core issues related to English in Europe and to ELF research. After examining the 'linguistic imperialism' viewpoint, with English conceptualized as closely and mainly related to (the imposition of) Anglo-American culture, a "killer language" and a "lingua frankestenia," (Phillipson) views that have envisaged the formation of a Euro-English variety (Modiano) within a macro-national vision of Europe are taken into examination. Throughout a review of relevant scientific literature, the author critically examines both positions showing how the first is not tenable in the European context, where a complex set of factors interweave and English

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[2] VOICE. 2011. The Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (version 1.1 Online). http://voice.univie.ac.at
[3] ELFA 2008. The Corpus of English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings http://www.helsinki.fi/englanti/elfa/elfacorpus

cannot be seen as (the only) threat to national or minority languages, provided its *de-facto* role of transnational lingua franca is acknowledged, going beyond the native / non-native dichotomy.
The second view, Euro-English developing as a variety in parallel with World Englishes (WE) paradigm, is also unlikely: in addition to the profound structural and historical differences between the Outer Circle and the European context, Kachru's categorization has been shown to be outdated, and reconceptualised models for Europe set forward to better capture the complexity for the use and users of English in this context (e.g. Park & Wee). In addition, the WE paradigm itself can be seen as connected to a nation-based conceptual framework that downplays the complexities related to the spread of English in more recent years. A variety of linguacultures are involved in ELF communication in European contexts, and, although the nation-state ideology is still well widespread (one language, one nation), Europe is highly multilingual, and English serves different functions: as the author argues, "an approach to English in Europe that is based on the concept of the nation is hopelessly out of tune with contemporary European identity formation, which is heavily influenced by poststructuralist conceptualizations of Europe as transnational, negotiable, locally enacted, hybrid and internally diverse." (17)
Concluding that neither of these approaches "has succeeded in improving the situation for non-native speakers of English in Europe," (20) the author focuses on how ELF research has brought about a paradigm shift in the investigation of English as a lingua franca in viewing "transnational European uses of English as a hybrid formation that emerges in linguistic practices and exhibits a high degree of contextual variability and negotiability, as it is shaped by speakers of different linguacultural backgrounds and proficiency levels." (20) This paradigm shift entails that ELF users are not seen as 'permanent learners' but rather as effectively engaging in communication via English as a shared (de-Anglicised) code, which is (locally) adapted and creatively appropriated in communicative contexts that are plurilingual and intercultural by default.
With reference to ELT, the author also points out how ELF proponents "are careful not to turn the findings of empirical studies directly (and uncritically) into an ELF syllabus," (23) but rather emphasize how certain non-standard features that have been shown to be intelligible and communicatively effective ought to be taken into account in ELT in their 'core' relevance, together with strategies for accommodation, meaning negotiation and cooperative interaction.
ELF research has been oriented towards a descriptive and qualitative analysis of how 'different' forms are functionally used in effective and cooperative ways in ELF contexts; more recently, as the author points out, it has been set against a "postmodern conceptualization of English" discourse (26) that goes beyond ethnicity and nationally-bound language(s) boundaries, which cannot be appropriately and fully captured within more traditional approaches, such as 'linguistic imperialism', and even WE, theoretical frameworks. The most relevant literature is taken into account, such as Hopper's 'emergent grammar, Makoni and Pennycook's problematisation of the notion of languages as separate and 'countable' entities and Jørgensen's 'languaging' (2008), as well as implications for long-standing tenets like the monolingually-set native/non-native dichotomy and the subsequent normative/formal correctness mindset. This theoretical complexity constitutes the backdrop of the study, where ELF is conceptualized as "a discursive formation that manifests itself in local linguistic practices" (p. 32) within the specific community of practice of ESC press conferences as a transnational context for language use in Europe.

Chapter 3 - "Methodological framework"- sets out the methodological approach to data analysis. The dataset is constituted of 78 press conferences with 39 participating national delegations (including performing artists, delegation members and journalists): the press conferences were video-recorded and transcribed, and the 192,000 words corpus was manually searched for relevant form-function features. This data definitively constitutes an interesting complement to existing ELF corpora, as pointed out by the author, too, in that it represents naturally occurring, semi-informal (and public) ELF use within a specific community of practice (media and music professionals) in an European context. The combination of several methodological perspectives, including qualitative and quantitative analysis and triangulation, allows to get a broader picture of the investigated language practices, as well as an integration of approaches in relation to the different linguistic phenomena, each requiring a specific perspective in order to "shift the conceptualization of ELF as a stable object towards a more processual conceptualization which acknowledges its internal variability and negotiability." (37) The framework can be defined as ethnographic and emic in the participatory and in-depth observation of the community of practice (CofP) under investigation.

The author provides an interesting and apt overview of the concept of CofP in relation to ELF, highlighting its appropriateness in defining ELF participants as legitimate users, in investigating specifically-set data more in detail, as well as in capturing the hybrid and fluid nature of ELF as locally realized in "the joint activities they [people] carry out while using ELF." (p. 38) Furthermore, it is argued, adopting a CofP perspective in looking at ELF appears more adequate than embracing a 'variety' or 'speech community' approach since it can better account for the translocal and situated practices that are inherent in ELF. The community under investigation – ESC press conferences – is defined as a proper CofP in aim ("providing coverage of the famous annual pan-European pop music festival," p. 39), as well as in socializing activities; some members – lead artists and their team, national delegates, journalists – continuously participate over the years, while for others participation is less regular. "Europeanness" is identified as the "salient identity feature" (37) of the event both because of the locations (cities in Europe) and of the participants, mostly from European countries; the overall aim of the study is thus to look into how "these European speakers 'do' ELF on various linguistic levels" and how "the Europeanness of the context" shapes "these linguistic practices." (39)

In Chapter 4 - "Code choice practices and European ELF talk" - the dataset is approached qualitatively as to the use of languages in the participants' repertoires and the reasons for these choices. Given that ELF contexts are multilingual by definition, and in Europe multilingualism is widely present both at the individual and at the societal level, it can easily be expected that the linguacultures of the participants surface in their linguistic practices, entwined with English in its de-nationalized, shared communication code. After an overview highlighting the contradictions in European policies aimed at promoting multilingualism, it is shown how English is the most widely taught (and learnt) language across Europe, with only a handful of other majority languages retaining a prominent position. The role that English increasingly plays in Europe as a de-Anglicized, different-from-ENL lingua franca can be seen to be "neither an opposition to multilingualism nor a threat to it" (p. 52), not least since one of the EU goals is that European citizens should have access to at least three languages, their L1 included. Furthermore, language practices involving several languages have been widely attested both in ELF (e.g. Klimpfinger 2007, 2009; Hülmbauer 2009, 2011; Cogo 2009, 2011) and in sociolinguistic research, where they have been termed as 'superdiversity' (Blommaert & Rampton), 'crossing' (Rampton 1999), 'languaging' (Jørgensen), 'metrolingualism' (Otsuji & Pennycook) and 'transidiomatic' practices (Jaquemet).
Findings in this volume show that plurilingual practices are well present in the context under investigation, serving several functions as attested in literature: micro-switches may be used to ask for assistance; to create a common experience among the participants "as professional artists, delegates and journalists involved in a pan-European pop music competition;" (p. 66) in greetings responding to a code-switch initiated by the interlocutor, and as a mutual accommodative practice and "symbolic convergence." (69) These translingual practices are at times performed in an Ln that may be part of the speakers' 'fragmented' repertoires, and are integral part of the hybrid communicative practices of these European ELF users, contributing to identity-formation in this specific CofP.
Besides, national languages are used in a minority of cases, mostly related to power issues within the ESC specific context, and when deemed comprehensible in terms of most known languages (Spanish, French, German, and Russian as the lingua Franca in Easter Europe). In general, longer stretches in a language other than English can be seen as marked linguistic behaviours highlighting national affiliations (which can also be hypothesized for ENL regional accents). Otherwise, a translation is generally provided in English.

In close connection with the previous chapter, in Chapter 5 it is shown how "Metalinguistic comments on the use of English" can shed light on the way in which language choices (and language proficiency) are conceptualized by the participants. After an overview on 'metalanguage' in linguistics, the author illustrates how "[f]olk metalanguage yields evidence of the social evaluations connected to linguistic practices," (78) such as national language affiliations, indexing "what is deemed appropriate in this transnational European community of practice." (79) Findings show that, while the one language-one nation conceptual discourse is present to a certain extent, the use of English in its lingua franca function is generally called for and promoted (by moderators especially), and at times even praised by participants, since it allows mutual understanding. Other languages, however, appear to be used occasionally and often to foreground national affiliation; the assumption that only English is widely understood emerges as a common stance.

Relevantly, drawing on a comment praising the use of English, the author notes that in this communicative context "[p]roficiency levels in the traditional sense (i.e. in terms of correctness or nativeness) are apparently not felt to be relevant" and "participants never complain about low proficiency levels of other participants, but they may criticize that no effort has been made to use English." (83-84) While "a good command of English is generally taken as a positive trait" (p. 86) as part of the professional skills in this CofP, several apologetic comments refer to a self-perceived poor proficiency in English but not in other languages, with reference to (grammatical) correctness and a native-like level of competence in particular. While supportive observations are provided in response to such apologies, a more varied picture emerges in relation to accents, both for British vs. American English and non-native accents. Remarkable in this respect is the German singer example: reacting to the media comments about the 'strangeness' of her accent and to the suggestion that it could be 'improved', she replies in a joking tone and sings a song where a stereotypical German accent is mimicked, thus expressing her "self confident attitude towards her own accent" since she is ready to sing the song again "even if the audience does not like her accent;" (93-94) it is worthy of note, too, that she refers to her use of English as the one she learnt at school. Besides, when the Native speakers in the Cypriot delegation were asked to evaluate the accent of the German singer, they "were reluctant to express any meaningful comments," (95) eluding what would traditionally be seen as an 'authoritative' position. This can possibly suggest that in such transnational contexts native speakers may no longer be perceived as the sole and best reference model, but rather that the contributions ELF speakers bring to English in its transnational lingua franca role are valued. As the author concludes, in these contexts participants "need to negotiate between more traditional ELT-related discourses in connection with their use of English and more ELF-oriented discourses that treat nativeness and correctness as secondary to communicative success, authenticity, and transnational orientation." (98)

Chapter 6, "Compliments in European ELF talk" specifically focuses on how complimentation is linguistically realized by different groups of speakers within this CofP, combining a quantitative and qualitative methodological approach. After a comprehensive overview of literature on complimenting in Western Anglophone cultures and on their sociolinguistic dimension, also in terms of gender, some relevant methodological issues are dealt with, focusing on the importance of taking into account a pragmatic (and contextual) perspective when dealing with complimentation in the dataset, as well as the power dimension and the level of familiarity. Findings show that compliments are highly frequent across the several linguacultures involved, particularly for non-EU participants; they are syntactically realized in ways that, although similar to native varieties of English, are less formulaic, in line with the heterogeneous hybridity of ELF, and possibly because of L1 transfer phenomena as well. One of the emerging functional and social aims of complementing practices is to create cross-national rather than national-based European solidarity; these ELF speakers effectively and pragmatically employ compliments to this (intercultural) aim, despite (and across) their various linguacultural backgrounds and beyond traditional gender norms as described in other (native) contexts.

Chapter 7 – "Relativisation patterns in European ELF talk" presents a mainly quantitative approach on relativisation practices in the dataset. The analysis is based upon typological considerations, syntactic function, humanness of antecedents and active speaker participation, as well as on European region and status and the speakers' L1. The chapter opens with a brief overview of some structural studies in ELF, setting them within a 'form-follows-function' and language change backdrop, exemplifying how these 'features' are present in the ESC press conference dataset, too. Relativisation is then explored, first illustrating usage patterns and research literature in ENL (and ESL) varieties, typologically hinting at other European languages, too. Statistical findings are examined through the following six main research hypotheses:

> 1) European ELF communication will show lower frequencies of zero and higher frequencies of *wh*-forms than native English usage; findings show that, although there do not seem to be striking differences from ENL spoken usage, *wh*-forms are more commonly used than ZERO above all for *who* in subject position;

2) European ELF communication will show "instances of relativiser *who* referring to non-human antecedents and of relativiser *which* referring to human antecedents" (165); this hypotheses is partly confirmed in the data: *which* is used to refer to human antecedents and *who* for non-human ones, although in a marginal way, thus not wholly confirming what has been suggested in previous ELF literature;
3a) ELF speakers with a North Germanic (Danish, Norwegian or Swedish) L1 in the dataset will prefer a ZERO pattern, given that it is common in these languages, while (3b) for speakers of Indo-European ones ZERO will be less frequent due to typological differences. The exploration of findings related to speakers' L1 backgrounds, particularly as to ZERO relativisation, shows that in this case hypotheses 3a) is confirmed, while for 3b) statistical findings are not significant.
4) relativisers are used along a continuum pattern from ENL/ESL to ELF usage in correlation with the participants;
5) "prototypically European relativisation patterns (i.e. high frequency of *wh*- forms and low frequency of ZERO) are more prevalent in central European regions;" (p. 179)
6) "EU candidate countries will pattern in between EU and non-EU countries." (181)

Hypothesis 4 is not confirmed either: there seems to be a preference for *that* across ENL/ESL and EFL press conferences, while *wh*- and ZERO diverge; this seems to suggest a move towards a "more typically European" (177) pattern, also in typological terms (Hypothesis 5) with higher usage of *wh*- forms and sensibly lower rates for ZERO, that appears most divergent for non-EU countries (Hypothesis 6).
All in all, findings from this chapter highlight that "these European ELF speakers are mostly in accordance with normative grammar and only rarely diverge from it," showing in this case that it is "not justified to consider non-standard relativisation a typical feature of European ELF;" (186) several factors, like the participants' L1 and typological differences, a normative-oriented approach in ELT, and the European (political) regions speakers come from may play an important role, too, and ought thus to be taken into account for variation and hybridity in European ELF.

The last Chapter "Synthesis: the discursive formation of European ELF" provides a critical summary of findings at different linguistic levels with three main aims: to contribute to current discussions on ELF conceptualization(s); to investigate the relation between findings in the specific CofP under discussion and Europeanness; to look into the implications for European language policies within an ELF-based perspective. ESC press conferences can be seen as a relevant European ELF context on several grounds: participants come from 39 different areas in Europe, who gather annually forming an interest-based CofP; English is used as the lingua franca ensuring intelligibility and wider communication, at the same time mitigating national affiliations. The way in which ELF works in this specific CofP can significantly add to ELF research, both from a conceptual and an empirical point of view. As highlighted by ELF researchers (e.g. Seidlhofer; Cogo 2012; Dewey; Widdowson), the hybridity of ELF runs counter to traditional theoretical categories, like those of 'variety', 'speech community', 'nativeness vs. non-nativeness', adherence to 'Standard language norms' and affiliation to 'national (Anglophone) cultural identities': ELF can rather be set within a postmodern framework, where linguistic and national / geographical boundaries are continuously crossed and trespassed. ELF may thus be better investigated – and its hybridity and heterogeneity captured in a form-follows-function perspective - through concepts such as 'variation' (e.g. Seidlhofer), 'languaging' (e.g. Jørgensen), 'superdiversity' (e.g. Blommaert & Rampton) and 'transcultural flows' (Pennycook). As findings in this volume show, within a European transnational context ELF also plays "a crucial role in the imagining of a Europeanness that transcends national boundaries" (197), not least in cultural, affiliation and identity terms, where "the 'Europeanness of ELF manifests itself in partly different ways at the various linguistic levels" and in "language choice, metalinguistic comments, complimenting behaviours and relativisation." (200) The plurilingual and pluricultural repertoires of these ELF users interweave with their use of English as a de-nationalised, de-Anglicised, in-common communication code that creates transnational affiliations, using pragmatic strategies -such as complimenting - as an effective and solidarity-creation tool. ELF thus takes on the role of a 'language of identification' in terms of Europeanness and belonging; rather than a 'killer language', it seems to be a conscious choice, that is willingly adapted to, and by, "the local communicative requirements of the participants in a certain context," (203) and positively perceived as such, rather than

(passively) governed by native-like models. As to the implications for European language policies, the current and widespread role of de-territorialized and de-nationalised lingua franca that English plays across Europe ought to be acknowledged and taken into account: "European ELF exhibits its own kind of heterogeneity, which in fact dovetails quite neatly with the European slogan 'unity in diversity'." (205) Provided its cross-cultural and cross-linguistic communicative function is recognized (first of all in the ELT world), rather than a vehicle of (imperialistic) dominance and a threat to other (national) languages, ELF represents a "partner language" (Hülmbauer, Böhringer and Seidlhofer) for cross-European communication, beyond 'one nation-one language' monolingual tenets. Furthermore, as the author points out, "[t]he increasing use of ELF is today more or less a bottom-up phenomenon, and therefore by far more successful than any top-down attempts to install large-scale European multilingualism (the declared aim of the EU)." (207)

The thorough discussion of conceptual frameworks involved in ELF sociolinguistic research, as well as of the European scene, makes the volume a valuable tool for researchers interested in the investigation of ELF within a post-modern analytical framework. The volume certainly represents a welcome addition to ELF research literature, not only since it well portrays and discusses the complex nature of ELF interactions (although at times literature on ELF could have included more up-to-date studies, e.g. on pragmatics), but also because the dataset and findings nicely complement those of other ELF corpora.

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