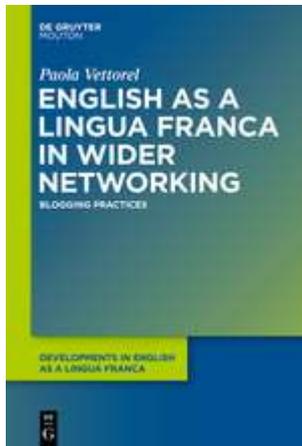# English as a Lingua Franca in Wider Networking. Blogging Practices

Paola Vettorel

Boston/Berlin, De Gryuter Mouton, 2014, pp. 348

Reviewed by Francesca Vigo[*]

Studies on ELF enrich libraries and bookshops, and have, more importantly, raised significant sociolinguistic issues, if not some more specifically linguistic ones.

Works by renowned scholars have set the ground and cared for the birth of a new field of studies, that concern English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), which is strictly connected to this time of ours, where distances are reduced thanks to technology, and boundaries are not so fixed.

Within the wider scope of contact studies, Vettorel's AIA-book prize awarded book holds a special place for her clever and fruitful investigation in the more specific field of ELF.

Starting from a careful and updated reflection on the concept of globalization as opposed to localization, the volume provides a first important issue on the 'modernity' of ELF. ELF was born, in fact, within and thanks to globalization, but, at the same time, its realizations are always local and localized, nurtured by each situation. ELF is, then, a hybrid phenomenon, it does not have clear boundaries nor does it aim to have any, similarly to many post-modern phenomena. Its (post)-modernity leads also to a key issue which requires a sound re-questioning, as the author suggests: the World English (WE) paradigm and its being still "'variety' based" (22) needs a revision since it does not seem to be wide enough to describe or include English-based languages, like ELF, which do not comply with the requirements set forth by the WE paradigm (namely being divergent but not too much from English and adhering to central English grammar). As the author suggests, drawing from Pennycook, "rather than trying to sort out the local from the derived (...)" (25) it is important to focus on what users do with English, what is "generated by its use" (Pennycook in Vettorel 25) and move forward to rely on a super-diversity approach, as devised by Vertovec.

The book perfectly presents ELF as an instance of language in the post-modern world, "a fragmented, contingent, marginal, transitional, indeterminate, ambivalent and hybrid" language (xxi).

---

[*] *Francesca Vigo is a researcher and lecturer in English Language and Linguistics at the University of Catania, Scienze Umanistiche Dept. She holds a PhD in English and Anglo-American Studies and an MA in Applied Linguistics. Her main research fields focus on Sociolinguistics, Language and Gender Studies, Language contact, Pragmatics in multilingual contexts, World Englishes and ELF, and Translation. Lately she has focused mostly on legal translation from both a linguistic and cultural point of view. Her latest publications are in these research areas.*

The research aim is clearly stated at the very beginning of the book, and more explicitly Vettorel's research aims at "providing and analyzing finding based on an empirical research related to the use of English as a lingua franca in a corpus of internationally-oriented personal blogs, investigating how and to which functions English is employed in such blogging practices" (xxiii).

However, the book goes further and its aim is reworded later in the book: the focus is on how Italian native-speakers use ELF in blogs and how they exploit their bilingual and/or pluringual skills to communicate and interact with a huge audience.

The seven chapters that make up the volume are a path towards the core of the book; and the introduction is a perfect opening.

The more general first and third chapters usefully open the books, re-proposing some of the well-known facts and figures concerning the spread of English, the Internet, its use, and CMC communication. Nevertheless, they go beyond, succeeding in linking the most general issues to ELF, and focussing on the translocal nature of communication that the Internet offers and ELF exploits. These two chapters also concentrate on the transformation of the concept of community that translocality implies.

Chapter three starts tracing back the history of CMC studies and investigates how language is used, highlights its hybrid nature skillfully withdrawing from Androutsopoulos' three main dimensions of CMC language (orality, compensation and economy), thus providing a description of CMD too. The informed and detailed analysis presented in this chapter reveals how blogs, and thus CMC, allow a multi-varied performance on behalf of the bloggers, which includes dialogic and monologic modes (89) to satisfy their relational and interactional needs. CMC research is, therefore, described in its current development: how it is going from trying to find CMC a place on 'its own' between written and spoken language to taking into account new forms and technical modes in relation to language, medium and context. CMC has lately been defined as 'conversational' since its modes contribute to "make written language suitable for social interaction" (Androutsopoulos in Vettorel 89). Again, the variability that the plurality of modes allowed by CMC brings about corroborates the post-modern nature of ELF, its fluidity, which allows it to adapt to every single CMC situation.

These two fundamental chapters provide evidence of the necessity of a 'language' for such a varied new scenario.

Chapters two and four are more specifically about blogs. Chapter two presents general features of blogs putting them in relation with Web 2.0 and its new practices. It is not a mere (re)presentation of known issues, it widens to include some witty insights on the nature of blogs, such as the fact that they go beyond a sheer informative role. They set new rules of multimodal interaction on the web and draw new types on communities, which exploit the 'elastic' nature of ELF as well as its undoubted adaptability. The limits that define these new communities are not geographical or institutional but functional and related to shared interests and 'friending' (73). Chapter two merges perfectly in chapter four, where blogs and LiveJournals are described and analysed as real contexts of ELF use and the author's corpus is presented. Aims are restated and the reader is ready to dive into the research since s/he has been carefully led to this specific moment: that of the empirical research. The criteria of selection and the creation of the corpus are, convincingly, explained as well as the decision of the author to remain a concealed observer is perfectly supported.

The corpus is made of "spontaneously produced ELF data" (109). It provides real examples of how and when ELF is used for interactional functions. It also shows how English is the only choice for LJ bloggers, many of whom are non-native English speakers but pluringual ones.

Chapter five and six present Vettorel's findings "according to tendencies as identified in ELF research" (xxvii). They are "presented and organized by looking at the possible common underlying motives underpinning the use of some lexico-grammatical features" (131). However, the common linguistic ground, the core, ELF displays proves to be only a base from which speakers develop their creativity. ELF's hybrid and post-modern nature is revealed in the participants' linguistic attitudes, which make them adapt their language, i.e. ELF, to each single interactional situation and enhance their creativity. Code-switching and -mixing practices are fully exploited. Chapter five shows how "most of the lexical innovations captured [...] are not erratic, irrational or unmotivated but follow well-attested word-formation processes and in this respect represent a continuation of the long-standing history in the natural development of languages" (Pitzl et al. in Vettorel 182). It also explains how ELF speakers rely of language repertoires that are far wider than English itself. ELF speakers seem to modify the fluid language they use exploiting every language resource available

to them to fit the interactional situation they live in, and fulfill their communicative and pragmatic aim. This pragmatic move is far more visible in the results discussed in Chapter six, where ELF speakers' linguistic multicompetence is described. Most of the examples provided by the data and presented in Chapter six show, in fact, the extent to which the users' plurilingual resources are exploited. Code-switching and adaptation are frequently used together with lexical creativity and meaning shift, as the author clearly describes. She also explains the strength of code-switching in community creation, something which has elsewhere been stated in ELF research and for which Vettorel provides ample evidence together with contrasting the common belief that considers code-switching a choice meant to corroborate the users' memberships in one group. Unlike previous claims, the author's show how relying on code-switching is a less intimate choice, whereas ELF is more widely used to express affection in her data, even if a significant rate of creativity is displayed in these cases. The fluidity of ELF is, in these cases, greatly exploited by means of lexical creation. Once again, the users' linguistic awareness proves very high and makes them choose the best and more efficient linguistic items.

Such a wide research and such productive outcomes naturally raise wider issues than those related to ELF use only. Appropriately, Chapter seven deals with some pedagogical issues and, more significantly, highlights the difference between user and learner, as far as people's (especially young people) relationship with the English language is concerned. English is part of the "young generations' lives" (xxix) and its role is twofold: on the one hand it is part of the 'top-down' process of education, on the other it is also part of the bottom-up move of socialization, broadly meant to include pop-culture and media in general. Vettorel's research and reflections show how speakers, despite their being creative and linguistic multicompetent as ELF users, do not perceive them as proficient English speakers, thus achieving poorer results as learners. Vettorel ascribes this attitude to the everlasting Native-Speaker model, which is still very strong in English language learning. What bound non-Native speakers together and strengthened them as English users, i.e. their creative use of English (LF), accomplishes a totally different result for them as learners. Raising their awareness proves not to be an easy task. Vettorel suggests a possible reconceptualization of some basic pedagogically significant notions.

Vettorel's findings are perfectly consistent with current ELF studies; ELF users' linguistic innovation and creativity follow well-attested processes, being them word-formation ones or the like, and, for this reason, they are linguistically and communicatively effective.

Among the other key points raised in this volume, one seems to stand out, especially now when European boundaries seem so weak and stable at the same time. Vettorel's book clearly demonstrates that it is now time to move beyond the original idea of discussing ELF in comparative terms, as well as it is now time to move beyond the native-speaker paradigm. As Seidlhofer maintains "wider networking needs a lingua franca", as well as reduced distances do. Vettorel's book is an inspiring guide through the world of ELF. It makes the reader understand what it is, how it is connected to the birth and development of social media and interactive resources in general. Despite the small-sized corpus structured for the research, outcomes prove revealing and corroborate the idea that further research in ELF is needed to strengthen the knowledge and raise the users' awareness on the ownership of it. Blogs, and more widely virtual interactive spaces, show how competent ELF users are, how skilled they are in selecting language items, mixing them with non-ELF items to create effective interactive exchanges. In blogs, ELF users are proficient and disclose a deep knowledge of linguistic formation processes; in blogs users seem to be freer users, they are conscious of what they do with the language they use. They own that language. Nevertheless, on the other hand, they appear less aware and efficient in a pedagogical context, as bravely discussed by the author in the final chapter.

The book definitely provides a very wide picture of ELF and, most of all, it succeeds in stimulating the interest for further research. After having read the book thoroughly, the reader understands the communicative strength of ELF together with its being necessary in such a world. ELF is a linguistic phenomenon of our times, and Vettorel shows this very clearly and sensibly. Her informed account presents a new kind of language, a fluid language, capable of fitting all possible communicative situations. A language difficult to describe in strict and stable terms, but efficient and reliable, a language with no owners, or with many, equally powerful, ones. Maybe these are the qualities of the new languages of our post-modern times.

Works Cited

The bibliography of Vettorel's book is huge, updated and consistent. Hereafter only the works quoted in the review are listed.

Androutsopoulos, Iannis. "From Variation to Heteroglossia in the Study of Computer-Mediated Discourse." *Standard Languages and Language Standards in a Changing Europe*. Eds. Tore Kristiansen Tore and Nikolas Coupland. Oslo: Novus, 2011. 145-161.

Pitzl, Marie-Louise et al. "A World of Words: Processes of Lexical Innovation in VOICE." *Vienna English Working Papers* 17.2 (2008): 21-46.

Seidlhofer, Barbara. *Understanding English as a Lingua Franca*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Vertovec, Steven. "Super-diversity and its implications." *Ethic and Racial Studies* 30.6 (2007): 1024-1054.