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# *Cultus*

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MEDIATION AND COMMUNICATION

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***Multilingualism, Lingua Franca or What?***

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# **CULTUS**

*the Journal of Intercultural Mediation and Communication*

## ***Multilingualism, Lingua Franca or What?***

2017, Volume 10 (1)

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ICONESOFT EDIZIONI – RADIVO HOLDING  
BOLOGNA

# ***CULTUS***

*the Journal of Intercultural Mediation and Communication*

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## INTRODUCTION

For this 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue we are very fortunate to have two extremely engaging conversations. They are both frank discussions on the state of the art of translation and its relevance today. We open with Henry Liu, recently President of the International Federation of Translators and close with a conversation between renowned scholars Susan Bassnett and Anthony Pym, who muse - over a glass or two - about the monster that is called 'translation'.

The conversation between the editor David Katan and Henry Liu, immediate past president of the International Federation of Translators (FIT), focused on three main areas. The successes and failures of FIT, the ongoing debate between textcentric and context based translating, and on multilingualism. Liu begins by listing the significant achievements over the past 60 years as well as what is still on the to-do list, such as improving the rights of interpreters in conflict zones. Katan then raises a number of elephant in the room questions, the main one being the future of the profession which he links to its insistence on 'mindless' and 'textcentric' ethics. Liu points the finger at academics, who are out of touch with the realities of the job, often responsible for the drawing up of professional guidelines. We will find two academics (Bassnett and Pym) concluding this issue, equally finger pointing – but in different directions. Liu creates a much more motivating vision of translation as a core skill to be learnt for a variety of professions, which will be echoed in the concluding conversation. Liu also tackles media criticism of the costs of multilingualism and translation by looking at a wider reality in the world, and that of the rise of 'non linguals'.

**Patrick Leech** carries the conversation forward, and notes along with Liu and Katan that it is 'communication' rather than language or languages that is often overlooked in policymaking. He begins with the EU's (varying) interest in 'language' and the knotty problem of how to promote both unity and at the same time safeguard diversity. Beginning with the EU enshrinement of the idea that all have the right to express themselves in their mother tongue, Leech documents the history of language regulation from 1958 noting the changing focus on multilingualism. The more recent policy documents focus on the economic benefits of language competences for businesses as well as the importance of a lingua franca (English). However, he concludes that in practice little investment has been put into multilingualism or into minority languages, due to the slow move away from static idea of one nation one language. With Brexit round the

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corner, this could just be the time, Leech suggests, to re-open the debate on the relations between language and political institutions.

**Michael Tieber** opens the section on interpreting with a report on a survey of attitudes regarding language preference amongst conference speakers at the European Union. He begins looking at lingua francas and then at the rise of English as *the* lingua franca. The elephant in the room is again scrutinized, but this time from the point of view of the conference interpreter. It seems clear from the literature that increased use of ELF is already leading to a reduced need for interpreters. A second problem is that for the interpreter (and for any listener), English as a lingua franca (ELF) is usually more difficult to decipher than the use of a speaker's first language. What Tieber focusses on next is attitudes. He investigates, using a corpus of young conference speakers at the EU, why non-English speakers might prefer to use ELF rather than taking advantage of trained interpreters. Reasons given ranged from 'taking control', 'impressing others', 'saving time', and also familiarity of the subject in English. Interestingly, however, they did mention that having interpreters benefitted the community by levelling the language playing field rather than boosting individual egos.

**Paola Gentile** and **Michaela Abl-Mikasa** follow on, analysing the conference interpreter's perception and reaction to the feeling that 'Everybody Speaks English Nowadays'. Respondents noted that this trend, along with machine translation and perceived increase in multilingualism, was damaging the interpreters' profession in terms of remuneration, work and status. At the same time, they noted that the increased use of low level ELF was significantly reducing effective communication. This is compounded by the fast past technological improvement and increased use of the machine whether it be for translation or for distance interpreting. The result is an increasing commodification of the profession. So, for reasons of economy, English is becoming the language hub around which other languages are routed. Respondents also noticed increased ignorant or non-appreciative client attitudes, an issue touched on also by Liu in the conversation. Another aspect (also mentioned by Liu) is that the profession itself *is* expanding, though as Gentile and Abl-Mikasa point out, it is away from the traditional conference mode, to that of community interpreting – and is itself heavily reliant on ELF.

The next paper, by **Lorena Carbonara** and **Annarita Taronna**, takes us to ELF itself. The authors report on a survey of teaching practice (of Italian) in a refugee camp. They begin with a discussion of how 'superdiversity' well defines the multi-dimensional fluidity of the migrant experience. Here, numerous linguistic and cultural communities use ELF as a bridge between student and teacher to learn Italian as a Foreign Language. The discussion continues with an explanation of how ELF differs from EFL (English as a Foreign Language). Their survey of teachers of Italian and of refugee students investigated the 'translingual practices' that took place in the classroom within the larger

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framework of a project designed to foster integration. So, for example, autobiographical accounts and self-translation were encouraged to help foster a sense of inclusiveness. In the language classroom, then, code-switching was the norm and the multilingual environment produced positive effects on the students. Teacher-talk was found to use more ‘mitigation’ strategies designed to foster more inclusiveness, compared with traditional EFL as well as teachers showing an active interest in the student languages.

**Maria Teresa Musacchio** and **Raffaella Panizzon** investigated the use of ELF and multilingualism from another angle, that of their own localisation of an emergency management software system. They report on the (g)localisation of a user interface focussing in particular on the icons and other visual indicators. The researchers first observed existing national emergency management systems, and looked at to what extent they were multilingual, and if and how they had been localised or transcreated. In their research they noticed different cultural ‘conceptualisations’ that affect the language used to describe disasters. For example, earthquakes were described as ‘an event’ or as ‘a risk’. The researchers also noted cultural differences favouring either the use of abstract or concrete language. Importantly too, the authors showed how iconic information was lost if not adapted.

In a rare case of translation professionals being actively involved as consultants as well as translators, Musacchio and Panizzon created a comparable corpus, termbank and translation memory based on contextual equivalencies and pragmatic adequacy. Of particular interest is the fact that employing translation professionals proved to be cost effective and made the software much more accessible to a global audience.

**Renato Tomei** conducts a particular case study of what can happen when state language planning policies encounter community-engendered speech-forms. Tomei, in particular, analyses the predominant role of prestige formation in linguistic choice dynamics. He begins sketching the background to the case study in Ethiopia, focussing on the Oromo. They represent the largest ethnic group, yet their language (Oromo) is not the official *Lingua franca* of Ethiopia, which is Amharic (and is also spoken by fewer people). At the same time, the constitution states that: ‘All Ethiopian languages shall enjoy equal state recognition’. To complicate matters English has spread through the school system and the media not as a colonising but as a liberating, *de facto lingua franca*. Tomei then adds a further candidate for a *Lingua franca*, Jamaican Speech Forms (JSF) of English, brought by the Rastafarian community who have repatriated from the Caribbean. His study analyses JSF used particularly in DJ talk, which is promoting ‘translanguaging’. Participant observation and recording revealed the influence of the Jamaican ‘way of communicating’, which was shared by the youth across different ethnic groups, regional states and political parties, and is now assuming the role of supra-regional *lingua franca*. This demonstrates just how strong communities of practice can be, upending the traditional ideas of colonial, or

state imposed language policies; and in this case, even undermining the strong Oromo ethnic claim to language dominance

**Dominic Stewart** approaches the issue of multilingualism from the point of view of 15 ex-pat writers who recount their experiences in a foreign language and culture (Italian) in another language (English). Stewart analyses the novels for evidence of what Bhabha would call their third space experiences. He breaks down his analysis into a number of areas including how language errors are reported, allusions to foreign language level and progress, and discussion about language learning. Much attention is placed on the use of direct quoting. Given the protagonists' low competence, speech literally translated is generally avoided. The important exception is for the Italian characters, whose imperfect English is translated for comic effect. The most popular strategy is 'homogenisation', hereby it is impossible to determine the language (or fluency) of the original words. Stewart suggests this is an example of covert (rather than overt) translation procedure. The covert domestication produces a linguistic 'fog' over what is the most problematic aspect of adapting to a new culture, but also helps foster the idea that deficiency only pertains to the linguistic other. As Stewart concludes, though the homogenising convention is commercially viable, the reader is detached from the most important reality, that of the language barrier.

We end this issue with a particularly candid conversation between **Susan Bassnett and Anthony Pym**. We find them at "one of those interminably repetitive translation conferences" discussing and demolishing a number of sacred cows. Pym begins suggesting that translation is not necessarily the (only) solution to interlingual problems. Indeed, it has become a monster denying the reality of lingua francas. Bassnett not only concurs but wonders about the exponential growth and direction of Translation courses and indeed of Translation Studies itself. Following the same lines as other papers in this issue, there is an understanding that communication requires translation, but that translation courses and practice are not necessarily helping communication. There was a time when Bassnett was promoting Translation Studies as an umbrella for Comparative Literature, but now the very term 'translation' seems totally up for grabs. The authors suggest that translation be a core subject integrated into a number of other disciplines, echoing very much Liu's ideas. What transpires in this conversation is that the study of 'language' appears to have lost much its relevance, while 'translation' has already expanded into (or been hijacked by) a number of other subject areas. Pym concludes, though, on a more positive note. At yet another translation conference, he finds much vibrance and energy. Translation is clearly going places, though the direction is not quite what was planned.

*David Katan*

## From Cassandra to Pandora - Thoughts on Translation and Transformation in a multilingual and multicultural future.

### A conversation with FIT Immediate Past President, Dr. Henry Liu

*Henry Liu and David Katan*

**David:** Dr. Henry Liu, it is a real pleasure to welcome you to *Cultus*. You have just finished your 3rd mandate on the FIT Council and as the 13th President of FIT. I know it is not a record, but it is certainly a long time. And now, even though you have retired you have been appointed Lifetime Honorary Advisor of FIT.

FIT, itself, has been going for over 60 years, and perhaps this is a good moment to reflect on where FIT is today, especially for those of us who were unable to attend the Congress in Brisbane this year.

**Henry:** Thank you David. It has been a remarkable journey serving the translators, interpreters and terminologists and our professional associations around the world for the last 9 years. I am surprised, honoured and I feel privileged that the XXI Statutory Congress of the Federation has appointed me as an Honorary Advisor, confined to 10 living members.

The Federation was founded by six national associations of Denmark, Federal Republic of Germany, France, Italy, Norway and Turkey in Paris in 1953 under the auspices of UNESCO, and now has members in over 60 countries and territories represents over 100,000 professional translators, interpreters and terminologists around the world.

During the last mandate, FIT has developed a much more visible profile with official visits to members in all the continents with regular press releases, position papers on pertinent and often controversial issues pertaining to our profession, a widely read quarterly magazine - *Translatio*, and a comprehensive social media presence across Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest with nearly 10,000 followers.

I am privileged to be leading this Federation which arose from a very strong and solid foundation founded in Europe of governance, diversity and

accountability, bringing together experts across cultural, socio-economic, political and jurisdictional backgrounds working together for the betterment of our profession.

**David:** So Henry, what would you say were the key successes during your mandate?

**Henry:** Amongst the many memorable successes, the adoption of United Nations General Assembly Resolution 71/288 on May 24 this year has to be most visible. This Resolution recognises the role of language professionals in connecting nations and fostering peace, understanding and development, and declared 30 September, St Jerome's Day - patron saint of translators, as International Translation Day (ITD).

This brings into focus and prominence the importance of our work in all human endeavours, celebrated by all UN agencies and in particular as a key to Universal Access of Information, which UNESCO will be jointly celebrating with ITD. The European Commission will also celebrate ITD along with the European Day of Languages (26 September). Here I must also acknowledge the hard work and pioneering effort of our sign language colleagues and counterparts as they achieved their recognition of the International Week of the Deaf (IWD) which is also celebrated on the last week of September.

Other successes include a formal collaboration and joint effort with the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI) (FIT 2015) and most exciting of all, the very first signed keynote address at this year's Congress delivered by none other than Prof Jemina Napier of Heriot-Watt University along with a dedicated stream on sign and spoken language research and collaboration, and the launch of an International Sign Accreditation system (World Federation of the Deaf 2015). Earlier this year, the first national professional association of sign language interpreters also joined FIT.

This mandate has been about visibility and collaboration. Earlier this year, the 2-year negotiation between World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) and FIT concluded in a signing of another important Memorandum. This will make a new beginning where translators, interpreters, researchers, trainers, scientists and intellectual property and trademark legal experts work jointly in a multidisciplinary approach towards the protection and promotion of inventions as well as indigenous, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions and genetic resources.

Last but not least, literary translation is the heritage of FIT. During this mandate, and celebrated in Brisbane, is our formal collaboration with the European Council of Literary Translators' Associations (CEATL) and the worldwide association of writers (PEN). This is especially important for the issue of copyright and publication best practices and the promotion of both the Nairobi Recommendation (1976) and the Quebec Declaration on Literary

Translation and Translators (2015).

**David:** A really impressive array of collaborations. Clearly, it is far too soon to talk of anything more than Understandings at this stage. But why is this so? You must be more aware than most that these definite successes will also be evaluated within the context of how the second oldest profession has been treated to date. For example, in India, I discovered that literary translators are not only badly paid, but can actually pay for the privilege to have their translations published. In a global survey I conducted, it was clear that professional translators do not really see themselves as part of a 'profession'. Why is it that we, or rather you (!), have had to start from such a position?

**Henry:** Despite increasing intervention through visibility, collaboration and dialogue, the working conditions and remuneration of professional translators, interpreters and terminologists has not reached the level which reflects the important role we play. Translation and interpreting schools remain underfunded, and language departments continue to be closed or downsized. And importantly and most regrettably, the language and communications need of the wider society and international community, especially that of refugees, migrants and smaller NGOs and SMEs remain unmet.

In fact, at the FIT Congress in 2014, we resolved to call upon national governments and the international community to protect local translators and interpreters in conflict zones, ensure a life in safety and security during and after their work in conflict zones, respect the impartiality of their work and work for a UN Convention for the protection of translators, interpreters in conflict zones during and after their service. We have had very limited success. My country, New Zealand and Norway remain the only two who have provided refuge to conflict-zone interpreters engaged in Afghanistan and their family. In January, the coalition led by Red T (a US non-profit organisation), AIIC and FIT since 2010 and now joined by a number of other organisations including WASLI had a rare and qualified victory which reversed the visa ban on former conflict zone interpreters imposed by US President Donald Trump. On May 25, 2017, during the UN Security Council debate on protecting civilians in conflict zones, Permanent Representative of Belarus to the United Nations, Ambassador H.E. Alexei Dapkiunas made the historical appeal on our behalf to the international community to protect translators, interpreters and linguists working in high risk settings working for military forces and peacekeeping missions. In doing so, they place their lives at risk and many of them are threatened, persecuted, prosecuted, incarcerated, kidnapped, and killed. However, an International Convention to protect conflict zone translators and interpreters remain elusive today.

**David:** Clearly translators and interpreters working in these areas are under intense pressures. But perhaps there is a note of optimism, in that academics,

Mona Baker being a notable actor here (e.g. 2006), have expanded their horizons and are now concerning themselves with, literally *Translation and Conflict* (the title of her 2006 book). But this is not the only challenges that face FIT is it?

**Henry:** FIT has been operating thanks to the good will of leading practitioners and academics from around the world. Monetary resources are limited. The funding model is predominantly based on subscriptions. There is always a tension between the contributions and concrete benefits one expects to receive. I often draw the parallel between that of EU and FIT, in that the distance between individual translators and that of FIT is similar to that of an individual European citizen and the EU. A lot of the important and resource intensive work are too distant from the daily grind of individual translators, interpreters and terminologists. Even though most of the aforementioned failures and successes are beyond the reach and capacity of national and even regional professional associations of translators, interpreters and terminologists, our profession is not immune from self-interest, nationalism, fear of globalisation and xenophobia. The tension between belonging to a bigger organization -with increased credibility, security, impact, influence and strength that comes with numbers - versus the financial contributions, the loss of autonomy and self-determination are much more palpable in the last few years. Perhaps, translation and interpreting not only encompass all aspects of human endeavours and are intrinsic to human conditions in this globalised world, but our profession or at the wider Federation level is also a microcosm of our times.

**David:** You mention our profession, and some of the problems. But there is an elephant in the room which we need to talk about. The future. So, let me paint a scenario, which I dearly hope you can get me out of. It begins like this: the translation profession is very much bound by conduit or instrumental understandings of communication. FIT, for this year's Translation Day *does* say that translators are involved in "challenging intellectual tasks that involve much more than mechanically matching up the words and phrases of two languages", and that "Only skilled human translators are able to perform these creative types of translation". That said, there still a huge constraint on being creative or interpretative; and making explicit what is tacit in the context is still a "no no" according to the FIT charter (the AUSIT charter is even more rigid on intervention). And many, such as the linguist David Crystal (Crystal and Jiang 2013) agree. Indeed, he says: "I don't expect my translator to be a mind-reader" (41). At the same time, research (and practice) is constantly underlining the 'zone of uncertainty', where the translator (though more often the interpreter) knows that communication could be improved through intervening on the text (adding, altering ...). But professional guidelines – and the market itself sees this as unethical or simply not their job.

If we combine this text-centred limitation on the translating professions along

with the rise in technology, by the year 2025, as some have said, we will be needing just a few copy editors to oversee the latest Google Translate and Interpret (along with a number of cultural mediators, transcreators, localisers etc.). And the word ‘translate’ will only collocate with ‘machine’.

Can you get me out of this scenario, and let me face my new 1st year Translation students with a more optimistic view?

**Henry:** I love these elephant-in-the-room questions. I strongly believe that it related to the answer to your previous question – “us”. What do I mean by that? David Crystal, for whom I have the utmost respect, is one of the most renowned linguists and unusually, having been translated into many languages, approaches translation from an academic perspective. Professional Associations perform many roles. AUSIT, which until recently has been led by one of the *Cultus* interviewees, another prominent academic Prof Sandra Hale, has also approached the professional dimension from an academic perspective (Hale and Liddicoat 2016). Fewer and fewer practitioners are at the helm of professional associations. Furthermore, AUSIT is but one of the many such Associations at a cross road - acting as a gatekeeper, whilst by this very act limits its income and influence - imposes academic influenced “standards” however perfect or stringent but most intrinsically and inherently unenforceable or at least with the agent, that is the associations, lack both the will and the authority to enforce such standards. This leads us to the question of relevance - the wider profession and those who practice for whatever reason do not subscribe to the AUSIT model as it becomes more and more detached from reality. How many translators and interpreters working in so called exotic languages and refugee languages are members of professional associations?

**David:** That’s a good question! You already know the answer, but according to my own (unpublished) global survey, 40% of the translators/interpreters who mainly use European languages, are not members of any association – which is bad enough. The number shoots up to 63% for those (nearly 500) professionals who work with mainly non-European languages. But these are, if you like, the elite ‘professionals’ very few of whom are involved with refugees. So, yes, these professional bodies are not particularly relevant to what is going on in the real world.

**Henry:** The question of relevance also strongly relates to the market. This is one of the many reasons why translators and increasingly interpreters fear the day when machine would replace this profession. Why? This is due to a series of mismatches - mismatch of expectation between clients and translators (see Jayne Fox’s [2014] excellent blog post summarising one of my earlier talks on this); mismatch of demands with an ever increasing supply of translation and interpreting graduates in French and German whilst the market desperately needs

Syrian Arabic and Pushtu; mismatch of priorities with governments and corporates spending money on multilingual website and ‘pseudo’-localisation without any resources towards listening in those languages or monitoring of social media in the ‘other’ languages.

**David:** Unfortunately, though we’d love to branch into Syrian Arabic, Pushtu and a myriad of other languages that really would stretch our resources ...

**Henry:** Going back to your question of text-centred limitation. Too often, translations are classified into literary translation where it could be summed up as rewriting creatively in another language and non-literary translation where it could be summed up as transference of one written tradition to another via a transference of terms, script and orthography. Standardisation by its very notion is to iron out variations and now automation and Big Data extends this further by actively reducing heterogeneity and diversity by its very derivative nature.

**David:** If what you’re saying is that the great academic divide is one of the problems, and that only literary translation is counted as being creative – that’s certainly what Venuti seems to believe. Then ...

**Henry:** To counter, the term trans-creation is rebranding a particular segment of the profession.

**David:** Certainly, but at least it puts the ‘creation’ back into non-literal translation (Katan 2016).

**Henry:** I would argue that translation should be more akin to interpreting (and vice-versa, part of reason why I propose the term trans-terpreting, see below). Dr John Jamieson and I believe that there is a strong convergence of skills between translation/interpreter and musicians. We are “*interprètes*”, in the sense that we bring the text to life. We ‘perform’ rather than ‘carry out’, and this idea fits much better into the widening of our professional scope (Liu 2017a). The written text, is like that of the score. It is merely a written representation of an inherently human experience. No one will hold out the original printed score of Mozart’s *Le Nozze di Figaro* and call it definitive. We may have different opinions on Mr Bechtolf’s controversial Downtown Abbey version for the Salzburg Festival, but it is no more or less definitive.

**David:** Yes, his production of *Figaro*, according to one review (Sutherland 2016) “is transformed into a cross between a slightly down-market Downton Abbey and Queen Mary’s doll’s house”, referring to Bechtolf’s emphasis on captivating the audience with a lavish BBC style costume drama.

This was seen, possibly, as a case of dumbing down or overpopularisation.

The review continues, though, saying “there was excellent clarity of action”, and actually ends with a final “Bravi tutti” thumbs up.

**Henry:** The same for translation. Applying your very own Access model (if I may interpret your call for improved accessibility as such), translators are providing not only an invaluable insight but a wider audience access to that human experience, by bringing the text to life. This is what machines hitherto have been unable to perform and are unlikely to be able to perform in near future.

**David:** Couldn’t have put it better!

**Henry:** Secondly, too often we limit ourselves in what translators and interpreters can do. How big is the translation and interpreting market?

**David:** I’m sure you’re going to tell me.

**Henry:** For a variety of reasons, my estimate will not be based on the annual Common Sense Advisory survey of \$43 billion (De Palma et al 2017). Rather, I would encourage firstly your first year students that translation and interpreting as we know it has only met a tiny proportion of the true demand, some of which is known and only met partially or by “others”, some of which unknown and unmet. For example who is ‘trans-terpreting’ Tweets and FaceBook post to allow multinationals to monitor their customers’ satisfaction?

**David:** Well, I noted recently that “All the major social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook, and the more business oriented Evernote, now appear to depend more and more on volunteers to translate their websites and mobile apps” (Katan, 2016: 372). But perhaps you know of professionals who are actually getting paid. These would be in-house staff with bi-lingual skills?

**Henry:** There are some global corporations which employ translators, more akin to ‘trans-terpreters’, to monitor social media in target languages and to translate the relevant messages into English for their respective Communication Departments to act on them. They are of course highly paid. But they remain very niche. The overwhelming majority of international corporations only engage in unidirectional multilingual communications (see above).

What your question however highlights is another very important issue, who is translating? Of course, increasingly so, the ‘who’ is a Machine or Machine-augmented. The remaining corporates, especially start-ups, and tech companies, as well as NGOs, almost always crowd-source their translation. These volunteers have variable qualifications and experience, and variable skills. For example, for the ‘Cochrane Review’, all of the translation is volunteered (Elm et al 2013).

Significant resources are needed from paid staff to manage these free translation to ensure quality, not to mention coordination and project management. This not only significantly erodes the paid work available to professional translators, in this case, medical translators, it also distorts the funding model. There is evidence that the relative role and therefore cost of translation in multilingual communications is diminishing. Yet, there is ongoing complaint and therefore drive from corporates to cut the ‘translation’ budget, meaning more resources are needed for the editing or typesetting or terminology management.

**David:** We’ll come to this issue of translation budgets in a minute. But what about NGOs and the like, people who are not motivated by profit. They too rely on volunteer translators. Is this a ‘good’ thing?

**Henry:** NGOs in particular are quick to seek help from translators to donate their services towards particular causes, humanitarian or otherwise. Whilst it is noble to donate, this also distorts the market and therefore harms the very livelihood of other colleagues as well as diminishing the perceived value of translation and multilingual communication. Furthermore, the spontaneous provision of free translation services means that authorities and the wider society no longer see the need to invest in training of translators and interpreters. I have never heard in any post crisis debriefing where experts have highlighted the need to invest in translators and interpreters. Such priceless learning opportunities are lost.

**David:** You are right, but there is some glimmer of hope here. The EU is funding a project focussing exactly on this (see Musacchio and Panizzon, this issue). Translation scholars, working alongside engineers, are transcreating/transediting software to improve communication during emergency management in realization of the limitations of what I have called ‘mindless’ translations (Katan 2014). What was particularly interesting was the realization that “icons do not always travel well across cultures” (Musacchio and Panizzon, *ibid*), and that they need to be rethought ‘mindfully’, taking account of how different lingua-cultures interpret the visual.

**Henry:** Indeed, as I said in Alcalá (Liu 2017b), the future of translation and interpreting will be multidisciplinary and multimodal. For the more ambitious students, tell them to disregard the boundaries of our profession. For example, why shouldn’t translation studies graduate become copywriters for international publishers or heads of communications in multinationals or international bodies?

**David:** Absolutely! But that means two things. First our courses need to be more communication oriented, more on creative writing with much more emphasis on soft skills and probably more background understanding about how business

works. Secondly, we also need students to be less conservative. We do attract students who themselves find the original text a good security blanket to keep close to. As Anthony Pym has said the “risk-takers will go into other cross cultural professions” (2008: 326).

**Henry:** Indeed, it is a constant struggle to get translators to free themselves from the shackles of the original text. Unfortunately, increasingly, interpreters are being trapped by this straitjacket also.

I see the multidisciplinary approach is key. Business studies are essential for the future. Also legal translators need to write like a lawyer, business translators need to write like a PR executive. I think this demand for a less conservative approach will also need to be placed on the professors and the wider academic structure. Translation and Interpreting departments are often placed in most secluded part of arts, humanities faculties focusing on the pure discipline. This is also exacerbated by the proliferation of translatology.

**David:** You are absolutely right, those of us who are drawn to ‘languages’ are probably divided into those of us who are drawn to the ‘langue’, the general rules regarding the language itself, or the ‘parole’, the communication itself. And, as fate would have it, ‘langue’ won the day, and our field grew out of Departments of ‘Language’ and not ‘Communication Studies’. Translators and Interpreters would be different animals had they grown out of ‘Communication Studies’.

**Henry:** There is ample evidence too to support the growing importance of social skills (Deming 2017; Torres 2015) and that the so called liberal arts degree with wider educational focus improve future employability (Hanushek et al. 2011). Not to mention that soft skills are the way that truly differentiate between experts and machines.

**David:** Indeed, a Mckinsey report (Mourshed et al 2014) on graduate employability reported that “many students are not mastering the basics, with Businesses reporting a particular shortage of “soft” skills such as spoken communication”. So, translators and interpreters should have the ability to communicate as their number one core competence.

**Henry:** Finally, I would also argue, this langue, text-centric limitation grossly underestimates the visibility and the power and influence our profession has and will have in the future, which is closely related back to the question of university funding.

Dr Hannah Burdekin at the University of Auckland is pioneering on a course which will emphasise Translation and Interpreting Studies as one of the fundamental skills in the ever more globalised world.

I am not suggesting that everyone who studies translation and interpreting ought to become practitioners. No, but I am suggesting that everyone who wants to operate at an executive level in the globalised world needs to know the basic of, the difficulty with, and most importantly the power of, translation and interpreting. How this could be harnessed in multinational marketing, implementation of foreign policy abroad and even just how to become a better global citizen. Now, this will no doubt entice those students frustrated by the irrelevance of MBAs and they will overwhelm Translation Departments worldwide.

Translation and Interpreting Studies will be the new Literacy of the Global Citizen! This is where we rightful belong.

**David:** Wow! You really have painted a great future, and my students will be heartened. Also, we should remember that the global survey I mentioned earlier had a question on pay, and I was surprised that, actually, well over half both translators and interpreters earn well over the national average. Over 10% earn up to 5 times the average, while nearly half (44% of the 428 replies) reported up to double the average earnings for their country. And less than 20% worldwide were reporting earnings of below the national average. Clearly, this does not represent all those who work in translation, but it does perhaps represent those who are aspiring to be, or have become, full-time professionals,

**Henry:** Absolutely! The range of remuneration for translators, interpreters and terminologists is as wide as the scope of our professions themselves. Just like rebranding translating and interpreting as core skills should open up many more university funding opportunities, for those of our colleagues who can prove they can provide unique specialist skills especially in the ‘parole’ part of language industry or even better giving advice to multinationals during reputational crises - the world should be their oyster.

**David:** This is a really dynamic vision for the future, putting translation professionals at the heart of effective global communication. And in 2017, the year of ‘Fake news’ (Collins 2017) and the rest, getting a message across - whatever ‘across’ means - is a minefield. Apart from politics, *The Economist* (2012) reports on the criticality of “Effective cross-border communication”, asserting that “Misunderstandings rooted in cultural differences present the greatest obstacle to productive cross-border collaboration”. We need some clarity and direction here. But who’s to help us with effective communication and improving access? This takes us back though to what you mentioned, this langue, text-centric limitation that FIT still constrains us with...

**Henry:** Well then, let’s work on more of this future for the profession. Given the so called Nairobi II - the PEN Quebec Declaration - has been adopted in 2015, it

is probably time for FIT to review the Translator's Charter too. We have three years before the next Congress in Cuba. Shall we work together and then find a national association who would sponsor it? How would you reword it?

**David:** Well .. let's see. Cuba sounds very appealing. Something on the lines of a translator is responsible for deciding the communicative intent of the original, for agreeing the purpose of the translation with the other main stakeholders, and is responsible for creating a translation which accounts for likely reception, adopting whatever strategy appears most appropriate.

But, I also think I understand the challenge. I have just finished writing Encyclopedic entries on "Defining Translation" for Routledge, and realise that agreeing on definitions is not just immensely complicated but also immensely political. Three years might not be enough. We need someone astute. Henry, you will have to take charge here.

**Henry:** Sure! We have now a vision. And together we are stronger. You and I together we can make this happen!

**David:** Great! We definitely need a compelling vision. But, let's also deal with another thorny question, one which problematizes translation itself. This is possibly worse than the elephant – as it is already headline news everywhere (outside of translation/interpreting circles that is).

It's on multilingualism, the theme for this particular issue. Translation and interpreting has been heralded as a way of maintaining language and cultural diversity, and at the same time it has been under attack, for at least 2 reasons. Firstly, it's seen as a system of control with the Access approach you mention under fire, mainly from the academics, as a particularly covert form of globalising Anglo-American culture and technology. Secondly, the market itself sees it as you have noted not just as a cost, but, more pointedly, as a barrier to community integration. I quote from Research conducted by '2020health' (Gan 2012) on the British National Health Service (NHS): "In Nov 2011, it was reported that the Ministry of Justice spent over £100 million in six years on translation costs. The news was perplexing, particularly at a time when the Ministry is cutting its budget by £2 billion and has closed 142 courts across the country". And later on we have a human rights lawyer, who says "[Translators/Interpreters] are doing harm because they are reinforcing the language barrier which separates this community from the rest of Britain. They are de-incentivising Bangladeshis from learning English,"

**Henry:** This is because the focus has been on costing and cost centres. Instead, we should look at return on investment. The recent boom in sales of Korean literature in English speaking world and k-pop, South Korean pop with much use of English, in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond has been an exemplary case of

soft power management which is arguable in large part driven by translators and investment in translation training (Rao, 2016).

Actually, the attack on multilingualism is akin to the attack on globalisation - futile as well as contrary to evidence. What you have cited as harm associated with multilingualism are anecdotal at best, pure speculation to be generous. Admittedly, we are now in the post truth era. In fact, we now have increasing evidence on the benefit of multilingualism for individuals as well as societies, or rather the cost of multilingualism is trivial in contrast to the benefits it brings to societies (Gazzola and Grin 2013).

So assuming that we are not becoming more and more isolationistic, what do we have to do; what do we have to change to prepare for and harness this trend towards multilingualism? But is multilingualism inevitable? (see below).

Here I must add that until such time when genuine, universal and functional multilingualism in an area or in an organisation is close to being achievable, we must specifically and habitually cite the very agents - translators and interpreters - whenever we refer to multilingualism or even bilingualism.

What I would argue is that so far, any discussion on multilingualism remains mostly a slogan, i.e. it stands as a label, a shorthand, an ideal which is in contrast to the other. Very few societies or nation states are genuinely multilingual let alone invest in its continuation or development. This is equally true in trans-national and supra-national organisations. The EU and the UN are notable exceptions with dedicated budgets and investments in multilingualism and professional translators, interpreters and terminologists to support it. But this is constantly under threat. Why?

It is a common held belief that English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) ought to be sufficient and should be the most efficient way to conduct international affairs and exchange, irrespective of domains, akin to reliance of Latin or French in previous eras. Now, this really is globalising Anglo-American culture.

What is more alarming is that competence of English is often over-estimated. If we can believe that competence of English in Scandinavia or in the Netherlands sits at high 70%, it means that the reliability of any interaction, discussion or negotiation held in English remains at the level of drawing lots or worse. And I have not even talked about para-linguistic features (see, for example, Albl-Mikasa 2015). Why is that important? Well, I argue that this is the reality at Greek or Italian refugee camps and worse still at camps for the Rohingya (Liu 2017c), who have for decades been fleeing Myanmar in droves. Officials must determine if an individual is a refugee or rule out that they are security threats. There will be imperfect English on both sides, or with untrained, unaccountable language mediators. Is that how we value human lives? And at a more selfish level, is that how we ought to have confidence in security measures to protect our societies and the values we hold dear?

Addressing the specific concerns over the NHS, there is growing evidence that provision of translation and interpreting lowers the overall cost of healthcare

provisions in migrant and non-dominant speaking communities and increasing compliance and overall health index (Flores 2006). This is based on the existing asymmetric and inequitable approach towards translation and interpreting in most Western countries. I have not begun talking about indigenous languages and Sign languages, both of which will be key to successful implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Yet, language services in general let alone translation and interpreting in particular remain invisible within the inventory of deliverables of humanitarian operations (Tesseur 2017; Liu 2017c).

When we speak of multilingualism, it mainly refers to a shorthand of official languages and often conjures up images of a line of glass booths full of simultaneous interpreters. This has become more and more evident, as FIT has become more active in its mission in development, we see the desire of many societies or organisations to emulate that of the European Union. We must be mindful that it is one of the many models. The reality of multilingualism on the ground like implementation of the EU directive (Eur Lex 2010) on the right to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings is closer to multiglossia or polyglossia. This is another aspect where Machine Translation or Interpreting will continue to struggle. No automation can facilitate exchange between a heavily accented Welsh farmer and that of his/her counterpart speaking one of the dialects of Napoli.

So barriers to multilingualism are not just bigotry or misinformation. In fact counter-intuitively, the rise of prominence of fake news, the lack of trust and the echo-chamber effect have meant that there is increasing appetite towards sources outside of what is provided by algorithms. This is certainly a heightened awareness of international collaboration in journalism like Panama and the Paradise Papers and with it, multilingual journalism.

But is multilingualism always positive (still assuming that it is attainable)? I am fearful of sounding like Cassandra. The hypothesis to which I have been attributed (Pochacher 2016: 219), I would prefer to properly attribute, calling it the Liu-Pöchhacker Paradox given its collaborative origin over a coffee ‘mélange’ one beautiful Viennese night with Prof Franz Pöchhacker. What this Paradox surmises is that the more multilingual the society is, the less respected, and hence less remunerated translators and interpreters are. This confirms the observation you cited in India earlier in this conversation. But it is equally valid in richer multilingual societies like Singapore and Switzerland. Thankfully, for translators and interpreters, and more importantly for aspiring translators and interpreters, this level of multilingualism remains a distant goal.

Which conveniently brings me to talk about the future. I am not sure if multilingualism as a trend is necessarily inevitable. But what I am confident is that provision of language services will be very different, not just due to the increasing level of Globish, or the relentless cuts in translation and interpreting budgets, but rather to the rise of the non-linguals. With shifting population, there is a rapidly rising proportion of population who received their formative

education in different language environments, whilst working in a third and married to a spouse speaking a fourth language and with children going to schools in fifth and sixth languages. What is his or her mother tongue? And how is that relevant?

This is an example of a highly functional non-lingual. The challenge is for us as societies to provide services to the less privileged non-linguals, those who have fled threats across long distances with no formal education and often with disabilities and trauma. Which sign language interpreter should we provide with the psychologist at any one of refugee camps when you have a deaf teenager who fled his/her country of origin at age 5 has never had formal education and has arrived at one of his/her many refugee camps 10 years later. And what services do we need to provide to and to engage with his/her siblings who are hearing and speaking with features and vocabularies of a mixture of 4 or 5 languages within one sentence. The answer will not be in a booth or in a dictionary! I would dare to say the answer will never be in an app or with AI!

**David:** Now we really are moving forward, from multilingualism to pluralism, and from Cassandra to Pandora. At which point we must stop – at least for the moment. Henry, many thanks indeed!

**Henry:** Thank you David, for this precious opportunity. I look forward to continuing our conversation.

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## ***European policy on multilingualism: unity in diversity or added value?***

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### *Abstract*

*Since the beginning of the third millennium, and in particular with the adoption of the Barcelona objective on 16 March 2002, which recommended the teaching to all of “at least two foreign languages from a very early age,” multilingualism has been a recognized part of European policy. The Barcelona objective was followed by a series of papers and reports elaborating on this strategy, beginning with the New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism (2005). The language philosophy of these proposals oscillates between considerations of identity and functionality. One orientation is clearly based on priorities such as the protection of minority languages and the promotion of diversity alongside the importance of multilingualism for intercultural dialogue - the substantiation in language, in other words, of one of the key principles of the European project, expressed in its motto ‘united in diversity’. On the other hand, beginning with the ELAN Report (2006), the Pimlico Report (2011) and the Study on Foreign Language Proficiency and Employability (2015), there has been an increasing emphasis on the functional utility of multilingual competences for business and trade, and in particular the notion that foreign language skills provide a competitive advantage, “added value”, for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This paper provides an overview of European policy on multilingualism as it emerges in European policy documents and attempts to chart the underlying language philosophies guiding them.*

Neither language nor language policy has ever been at the heart of the European project. The birth of European institutions in the 1950s concerned institutional and economic issues rather than cultural (and still less linguistic) ones. The transformation of the European Union from a 15-state entity in 1995 to one of 25 and then 28 states (2004-2013) had little impact on language policy. At the

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time of writing, apart from some isolated comments,<sup>1</sup> the British exit from the European Union has not been considered from the point of view of its impact on language use in the EU.

This neglect of language issues within the framework of the development of a new kind of political entity, the European Union could be considered curious in light of the crucial symbiosis between language and political institutions in the formation of nation-states. The nation-building paradigm of nineteenth-century Europe was strongly based on the notion of an essential “fit” between national identity (from Herder onwards strongly linked to the sharing of a common mother tongue) and the state (see, for example, Gellner 1983; Anderson 1983). This fundamental link between language and political institutions, never absolute but always significant in the case of the nation-state, is inapplicable to Europe, whether considered as a “family of nations”, to use Margaret Thatcher’s term, or a federation of nations becoming an “ever closer union”.<sup>2</sup> This is clearly due to the federal nature of the European experiment, based on an acceptance of diversity and thus the inappropriateness of any move towards a common language. Instead, a democratic political entity such as the European Union, relying on communication between nations and citizens in a large number of languages which are, to a considerable extent, mutually incomprehensible, should surely require a serious and forceful policy regarding multilingualism.

According to some, this need has been perceived more by some of the citizens of Europe than their representative institutions (De Mauro, 2014: 80). But it would not be true to say that these institutions have paid no attention at all to issues of language. There have been, for example, moments when foreign language competence was specifically promoted, for example, in the “Lingua” programme of the early 1990s (subsequently subsumed, along with the “Erasmus” programme into the “Socrates” programme), which aimed to promote language teaching and learning and in particular, for a time at least, minority languages (Wright, 2016: 145; Gubbins, 1996: 124-25) Language has also been the specific focus of a number of European policy documents, and these will constitute the principal focus of this article.

Two underlying attitudes can be found in this documentation. The first sees language as a fundamental right, as an element of cultural inheritance tied essentially to spatially-defined linguistic or ethnic groups. As such, all languages

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, the comments made by Danita Hubner, chairwoman of the European Parliament’s constitutional committee, who suggested that, with Brexit, English might be dropped as an official language (Boyle, 2016), and Jean-Claude Juncker, who in a speech in Florence on 5 May 2017 put forward the view that “slowly but surely English is losing importance in Europe” (Rankin: 2017).

<sup>2</sup> The expression “ever closer union”, to be found in many of the founding documents of the European project such as the treaties of Rome, Maastricht and Lisbon, was a specific target of the British Prime Minister David Cameron during the negotiations between Britain and the EU before the “Brexit” referendum of 23 June 2016.

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need to be protected as guarantors of Europe's pluralism and as a demonstration of the equal treatment of difference within overarching European institutions – a substantiation of its principle of being “united in diversity” (Curti Gialdino, 2005: 129-136). A second, more recent approach has focused instead on the usefulness of competence in foreign languages for economic competitiveness and thus for growth and employment.

Early in the history of the institutions of what was to become the European Union, the issue of language was approached in order to avoid equivocation and the possibility that any one language or languages should rise to anything like hegemonic status. Indeed, the very first procedural regulation of the European Community, the “Regulation No 1 determining the languages to be used by the European Economic Community” of 15 April 1958, laid down that the four principal languages of the six nations that had joined the European Economic Community should all be considered both as “official languages” and as the “working languages” of the European institutions (“Regulation”, 1958: 59)<sup>3</sup>. This principle, that all national representatives have the right to express themselves in their native languages, has been maintained ever since,<sup>4</sup> although the “procedural” or “working” languages of the institutions of the European Union used in everyday documentation have now been effectively restricted to English, French and German (Kruse & Ammon, 2013: 174).<sup>5</sup> This rights-based approach extends beyond the regulation of language use in European institutions to the relations between citizens and these institutions. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2002) lays down, under article 41 regarding “the right to good administration”, that “every person may write to the institutions of the Union in one of the languages of the Treaties and must have an answer in the same language.” (“Charter”, 1992: 7).

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<sup>3</sup> The Regulation no. 1 made no clear distinction between “official” and “working” languages, as is noted by Labrie (1993: 81). The distinction remains, however, in the everyday practice of the EU, although, as Phillipson points out, the term “working language” is used in a number of different senses (2009: 147). For an extended discussion of the Regulation, see Labrie (1993: 74-86).

<sup>4</sup> This results, as is well known, in substantial costs (almost 1% of the annual EU budget) in terms of translation and interpretation (Phillipson, 2002: 114).

<sup>5</sup> According to Grin (2006: 86), there has been a “progressive, though presently not official, drift toward the dominant, or even sole, use of English as a working language of European institutions” something borne out by the research presented by Kruse & Ammon (2013: 166-67). Grin further points out that, in purely economic terms, this “amounts to a massive transfer in the direction of native speakers of English, paid for by everybody else”, the result of “net savings” from not having to invest time and money in learning other languages and from their quasi-monopoly of the market in English-language text-editing and language teaching (Grin, 2006: 86-7). See also Phillipson (2006: 355).

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The founding moments of European institutions, then, recognized multilingualism as a core practice.<sup>6</sup> Whether this multilingualism in official documents is fully functional, however, is open to discussion. Already in 1993, when there were only nine official languages, it was objected that it was impossible to avoid discrepancies and ambiguity in so many different languages and versions (Labrie, 1993: 139), something which is of course even more the case when we consider the 24 official languages in use today. In any case, for our present concerns it is enough to note that although language issues were the focus of some attention for the early builders of Europe, their interest was to a large extent “internal” - they were primarily concerned with working procedures within the institutions. Language “policy” in this documentation, in other words, appears as a technical and practical regulation regarding the procedures and communication of central institutions, or as an administrative right, and not as a strategic statement of aims and objectives (see Phillipson, 2002: 107).

If this may be considered the starting point for the orientation of European institutions towards language, the period following the Maastricht Treaty began to put greater emphasis on language competence as an element of education policy within the Union (“High Level Group”, 2007: 5). This new emphasis culminated in the adoption of the Barcelona Objective passed by the European Council of 2002. As part of the European Council meeting of 15 and 16 March 2002, within the overall section, “Education,” it recommended that school systems should aim “to improve the mastery of basic skills, in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age.” (“Presidency conclusions”, 2002: 19). The Barcelona Objectives were a response to the Lisbon Strategy, which aimed to promote sustainable economic growth within the European Union. The recommendation of the European Council thus not only encouraged multilingualism as a key basic skill (on the level of literacy and arithmetic, it would seem) but also, importantly, wedded linguistic competence to economic growth within the overall framework of the push towards a “competitive economy based on knowledge” (“Presidency Conclusions”, 2002: 19). The founding principle of this second approach to multilingualism, then, sees competences in foreign languages not within the framework of the rights of the speaker but as part of a general strategy of economic growth through the development of the key immaterial infrastructure of education and knowledge.

This objective was subsequently taken up in a number of ways by European institutions (see “High Level Group”, 2007: 5). Multilingualism was first included officially in the responsibilities of a minister of the European Union in 2004, at the time Jan Figel, as part of a portfolio dedicated to “Education, training, culture and multilingualism.” In 2007, under the presidency of José Manuel Barroso, a

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<sup>6</sup> For an overview of the use of languages in European institutions until 2002, see Phillipson (2002: 105-138). For European policy on multilingualism, see Rindler Schjerve and Vetter (2012).

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Commissioner for Multilingualism was set up and the post was given to the Romanian Leonard Orban. In 2010 the responsibility for multilingualism was reabsorbed into the portfolio of Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, and since 2014 multilingualism as a specific responsibility seems to have been lost. It should be noted that responsibility for multilingualism has now passed from the Directorate General for Education to the Directorate General for Employment. The move would seem to reinforce an awareness that language competence is not only a right or a basic skill but an important factor in economic growth and labour mobility. This shift in emphasis, in fact, has been the object of specific criticism on the part of the Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity, an organization particularly linked to the promotion of minority languages. A member of this Network, the Dutch politician Jannewietske de Vries, sees it as evidence of a “utilitarian, market-oriented approach to the languages of Europe, which will only prioritize big, hegemonic languages” (De Vries, 2014).

The Barcelona objective first found more concrete expression in the document produced in 2005 entitled “A New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism”. Despite the functional context in which languages were included in the Barcelona document, the preamble to this document still highlighted cultural and identity-related aspects of language. Going beyond what might be regarded as the simple guaranteeing of equal rights to the official languages of Europe, the focus instead was on seeing the linguistic diversity of Europe as a positive trait, as a multiplicity which was characteristic of, and beneficial to, the European project. It stressed, in fact, that the European Union was not a “melting pot in which differences are rendered down but a common home in which diversity is celebrated, and where our many mother tongues are a source of wealth and a bridge to greater solidarity and mutual understanding” (“New Framework”, 2005: 2). The paper indicated a number of specific actions aimed at the promotion of multilingualism which still form the basis for European policy: the promotion of national strategies, better teacher training, early language learning, content and language integrated learning (CLIL), the promotion of languages in higher education, the development of the academic discipline of multilingualism, and the setting up of a European Indicator of Language Competence. One section of the document, however, entitled “The Multilingual Economy”, specifically developed, for the first time in a European policy document, the functional link between language competence and economic growth. It reported in particular that there was “some evidence that European companies lose business because they cannot speak their customers’ language” (“New Framework”, 2005: 8). Added to this was a recommendation that deficiencies in language competence constituted a brake on the mobility of labour, a crucial element of the single market.

The New Framework in turn gave rise to a series of working groups and policy documents aimed at fleshing out and coordinating European policy on

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multilingualism. The first of these was a High Level Group on Multilingualism, consisting of 11 experts, which was set up in 2006 with the specific objective of providing “support and advice in developing initiatives, as well as fresh impetus and ideas for a comprehensive approach to multilingualism in the European Union” (High Level Group, 2007: 7). Again, despite the new focus on language competences as functional to economic growth, this was only one of the key areas covered. The group also focused on language as integral to intercultural dialogue and social cohesion, particularly in the context of increases in migration (“High Level Group”, 2007: 10).

The second working group to follow this theme was the Group of Intellectuals for Intercultural Dialogue chaired by the Lebanese-French writer Amin Maalouf. Its focus, as indicated in the title, was precisely the need to enhance intercultural dialogue within Europe, but language was central to its deliberations. Its report endeavoured to see the language issue as a challenge but also as an opportunity, and to explain how “the multiplicity of languages could strengthen Europe,” as indicated in the report’s subtitle. In particular it argued that it was necessary to combat the creeping dominance of English as the *de facto* language of international dialogue, which “would be damaging to the economic and strategic interests of our continent and all our citizens irrespective of their mother tongue” (“Rewarding Challenge”, 2008: 5). To combat this, the group proposed the somewhat quirky solution that European citizens should develop, alongside their mother tongue, a “personal adoptive language” in which to be able to communicate on a European level.

A third group, whose work stands as a more specific testimony to the new economic interest in the promotion of languages, was the Business Forum for Multilingualism. The Forum first met in 2007 and produced a set of recommendations in a published report entitled “Language Means Business” (2008). It was followed by a second Forum in 2009, set up by the Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission. The Forums followed the format of a “structured dialogue”, the latter including 21 representatives from four different areas of interest: intermediate business groups (Chambers of Commerce, Business Europe, etc.), Higher Education Associations, specialist bodies and networks, as well as the European Economic and Social Committee. Already in 2007, the first Forum warned that Europe was “running the risk of losing the war of competences, as emerging economies mainly in Asia and Latin America rapidly acquire language skills and other skills necessary for competing successfully on tomorrow’s markets” (“Language Means Business”, 2008: 8). If there was no substantial intervention to improve language skills within Europe, the greater language competence of entrepreneurs from other areas would give them a significant competitive advantage on world markets. This group too came out strongly against the complacency of relying on competence in English as a *lingua franca*. English was a basic skill, but knowledge in other languages could provide an important competitive advantage.

Language competence, moreover, was not just one element amongst many. For this Forum, it was a basic, transversal element to be taken into consideration at all levels: “The challenge is to integrate multilingualism firmly in all strategies aiming at developing human capital for the future” (ibid.).

The policy statements produced by different bodies as a development of the New Framework, then, while operating within the broad framework of culture, identity, and solidarity, began to highlight the need to invest in language competences as part of the creation of the human capital necessary to sustain a knowledge-based economy in the context of global competition. This focus on business, growth, and employment can also be found in three research studies commissioned by the European Union.

The first of these was the *ELAN Report. The Effects on the European Economy of Shortages of Foreign Language Skills in Enterprise*, published in 2006 and used by the Business Forum for its recommendations. This developed the view that a significant amount of business was being lost to European enterprises as the result of the lack of the necessary language skills. It admitted that English was a key language for gaining access to export markets, but argued that competence in other European languages, such as Russian, German, Polish (for Eastern Europe), French (for much of Africa), and Spanish (for South America), constituted the crucial competitive added value. It indicated, specifically, four factors in language management as crucial to the success of exporting SMEs: the elaboration by each firm of specific language strategies, the recruitment of native speakers, the selection and training of staff with languages skills, and the use of translators and interpreters (“ELAN”, 2006).

The second study was the *Pimlico Report on Language Management Strategies and Best Practice in European SMEs*, published in April 2011. The report began with a quotation from Willy Brandt, the former German chancellor which cleverly sums up the need for foreign language skills in commerce:

*If I am selling to you then I speak your language, aber wenn du mir etwas verkaufst, dan mußt du Deutsch sprechen.*<sup>7</sup> (“Pimlico”, 2011: title page).

The report focused on identifying and describing models of best practice in 40 European SMEs selected for having experienced significant trade growth thanks to their adoption of a language management strategy, the “planned adoption of a range of techniques to facilitate effective communication with clients and suppliers abroad”, in accordance with the recommendations of the ELAN report. It cited 14 different measures adopted by these SMEs including common ones such as professional translation/interpretation, language training and staff mobility. Three measures, however, emerged as particularly influential: multilingual website adaptation, the recruitment of native speakers, and the use of local agents to solve language problems. General characteristics underlying successful export companies included functional capacity across a range of

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<sup>7</sup> “...but if you sell me something, you must speak German.”

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languages, high level competence in English, and a pervasive internationalism underpinning their human resource strategy (“Pimlico”, 2011: 4).

The third document, issued late in 2015, was the *Study on Foreign Language Proficiency and Employability* (2015) which, within the overall policy context of Education and Training 2020, analysed the needs of employers for foreign language abilities across all 28 members of the European Union. This paper confirmed the overall perception of the importance of English as a lingua franca and in general as the most required language for companies, but it too indicated competence in another European foreign language as the crucial added value for competitiveness. The document added little to the previous ones; its importance can be found in the specific policy recommendations it put forward for public bodies and educational institutions. In line with the functional value placed on languages as a factor in economic growth through competitiveness and labour mobility, it recommended greater attention to language competences across the curricula – not just, in other words, to foreign language and literature departments, but to all areas of education. And national governments should have the overall responsibility to “support higher education institutions in ensuring that vocational and language degree courses reflect the breadth of need for foreign languages by employers” (“Study on Foreign Language Proficiency”, 2015: 104, 107).

What can we conclude from this survey of documentation regarding the policy of the European Union on multilingualism? It shows, it would appear, a gradual increase in awareness of the importance of language competences and the need for a coherent and comprehensive language policy. The purely procedural interest of European institutions in regulating language use with the objective of guaranteeing equal rights has given way to a series of institutional discussions which have broadened the scope to include issues of culture, intercultural, solidarity and in particular communication in the world of economic exchange. But the sense of a single, focused interest in investing in multilingualism is arguably still missing. The recent draft joint report of the European Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, *New priorities for European cooperation in education and training*, dedicates no specific attention to foreign language competences, considered only as part of a series of “other competences” such as digital awareness and creativity to take their place alongside other “basic skills” (“New Priorities”, 2015: 3).

Language policy in Europe took as its starting point, as we have seen, the right to express oneself in one’s mother tongue and consequently the equal rights of all national groups committed to the European project to have their own language recognized and guaranteed. As a shield against the expansion of any one language as a result of political or economic dominance, and a safeguard against any linguistic hegemony, this is surely a necessary baseline. But it constitutes a static principle, one which by its nature does little to enhance the development of

the plurilingualism of European citizens. It is, moreover, strongly linked to an idea of a nation as co-extensive with its principal language, one which downplays the extent and importance of competence in minority languages but also, more seriously perhaps for the specifically European dimension, strengthens the idea of a European polity based on the cooperation of distinct nation states rather than the “ever closer union” enshrined in the preamble to the Treaty of Rome. The recent emphasis on the need for foreign language competences in an increasingly interrelated European economy based on knowledge and human capital and not on economies of scale may instead open up a wider debate on language use and language policy in Europe. It may, for example, re-open a debate on the relation between language and political institutions with specific reference to the particular case of Europe. Tullio De Mauro recently stressed the extent to which multilingualism has always been significant part of European history and culture (De Mauro, 2014: 25-26). He also made the point that whereas autocratic states are relatively uninterested in the language competences of their subjects, democracies cannot avoid a strong concern for the capacities of their citizens to communicate, as this is part of the ontological make-up of a participatory democracy (De Mauro, 2014: xi). The imminent withdrawal of Britain from the European Union will lead to a situation in which the principal working language of European institutions will be divorced from the principal nation it “represents” (leaving aside, for the moment, the question of which language Ireland uses as its official language). It may be the moment to go beyond the (necessary but not sufficient) defensive position of “official languages” and commit to a recognition of multilingualism not only as central to European identity (being united in diversity) but also as a crucial functional tool for the enabling and enhancing of communication amongst its citizens. Multilingualism contributes to economic growth and guarantees effective participation in political processes. The crucial added economic and political value that multilingualism provides should put it at the heart of the European project.

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## ***English as a Lingua Franca vs. Interpreting – Perspectives of Young Conference Participants on Two Competing Means of Communication***

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### *Abstract*

*The global spread of English has had far-reaching consequences for transcultural communication. The hegemony of English reflects a growing asymmetry between languages of lesser and greater diffusion and has been criticised on many occasions. English is, however, no longer exclusively owned by its native speakers, since those who use it as a lingua franca now represent the majority. The increased use of English as a lingua franca (ELF) also has implications for interpreting. 20 years ago, Seleskovitch (1996: 306) projected that the use of a single language in international settings would lead to a lower demand for conference interpreters, and a number of studies indicate that this projection is indeed becoming a reality. Another ELF-related phenomenon in the context of international conferences is the preference for English in settings where interpreting is available, and speakers can use their first language (L1). As a consequence, interpreters are confronted with a growing number of non-native speakers and their restricted power of verbal expression. This paper deals with the use of English at international events and presents a qualitative study on the preference for this language in conference settings. The study was conducted at the Model European Union (MEU) 2015 in Strasbourg, which constitutes the largest simulation of EU policy making, involving more than 100 participants and several working languages. On the one hand, the results shed light on the broad spectrum of reasons behind the preference for English when presenting a speech in front of an international audience. On the other hand, the study reveals possible advantages of using one's L1 according to young conference participants.*

### **1. Introduction**

English has become a global lingua franca and is far more frequently used as a second or third language than as a first (Seidlhofer 2011). The unique status that English enjoys today has its roots in historical developments such as the rise of

the British Empire, but also in socio-cultural trends which contributed to the language's social prestige. These factors facilitated the development of English as a global lingua franca.

The dominance of English also becomes increasingly apparent in the context of international conferences, where ELF competes directly with interpreting. The increased use of ELF in conference settings puts interpreters under pressure as they report a decrease in assignments (Chang & Wu 2014; Albl-Mikasa 2010). Also noteworthy in this context is the trend of presenting a speech in English instead of using one's L1<sup>1</sup>, even when interpreters are available (Pöchhacker 1994; Donovan 2009).

The following study takes up these issues and focuses on the broad spectrum of reasons for preferring English to one's first language when delivering a speech at an international conference. To investigate this phenomenon, qualitative interviews were conducted at the *Model European Union 2015* in Strasbourg. The study places particular emphasis on young people's opinions on the advantages and disadvantages of using ELF or L1. The sample of MEU participants can be considered part of a population which is relevant to the phenomenon as a whole. By taking part in this event, the participants show high interest in supranational cooperation and international politics and demonstrate special awareness of multilingualism and multiculturalism.

In the first two sections, the theoretical background is introduced by first putting ELF into the context of globalisation and subsequently describing the implications of the increased use of English for conference interpreting. Following these premises, the study carried out at MEU 2015 and its results will be described in Sections 4 and 5.

## 2. Contextualising ELF within Globalisation

As mentioned before, English has become by far the world's most widespread lingua franca. In its basic meaning, the term "lingua franca" defines a language that is used in common by people with different native tongues (Samarin 1987: 371). In the past, *linguae francae* were mainly used in trade and among intellectuals.

ELF is, however, surpassing all of its predecessors in terms of its global range. Never before in the history of human kind has a language attained a similar number of L2 speakers (Lewis et al. 2015). What is more, it has been shown that non-native speakers of English outnumber native speakers. According to Crystal (2006), only 400 million of the 1.4 to 1.5 billion users of English are native speakers. Kachru (1985) attempted to classify speakers of English more precisely

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<sup>1</sup> In this contribution, the term "first language" (L1) will be used instead of "mother tongue". L2 refers to "second language".

by dividing them into three circles: the ‘Inner Circle’, where English is used as a first language, for example the UK or USA, comprising 320-380 million speakers; the ‘Outer Circle’, with English as an additional language, like former British colonies such as Kenya or India, accounting for 300-500 million speakers, and the ‘Expanding Circle’, including all countries where English is used as a foreign language, with 500 million to 1 billion people. Despite the criticism to which this model was subjected, it still shows that native speakers of English are no longer the exclusive owners of their language, as they share it with a growing community of people who use it as a *lingua franca*.

The spread of English and its dominant status have been deplored on many occasions, as this development represents rising “linguistic imperialism” (Phillipson 2003: 162) endangering minority languages, which is seen as a catalyst for their extinction. Cronin (2006: 138-141) takes a similar stance by highlighting a growing asymmetry between languages of lesser and greater diffusion, representing an inequality of cultures and languages. The increasing use of ELF in international conferences can be seen as part of this development.

When attempting to define ELF, it is necessary to explore the circumstances under which English is used as a *lingua franca*. In this sense, a frequently cited definition of ELF is the one proposed by Seidlhofer (2011: 7), who describes ELF as “any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option.”

It is not surprising, therefore, that ELF has become a highly important factor in international communication having a significant impact on conference interpreting, as will be discussed in the following section.

### **3. Implications of ELF for Conference Interpreting**

ELF and conference interpreting seem to be two means to the same end, as both enable communication among individuals with different first languages. In a way, they can be seen as two competing modes of communication. As English is nowadays by far the most widely used language at international conferences (Neff 2008), it can be assumed that this must bring about substantial changes to the profession of conference interpreting. Seleskovitch made this prediction as early as 1996:

In future it can be expected that to a large degree interpreting will disappear from the international scene. With time the universal use of a single language in international conferences will make resorting to interpreters less necessary (Seleskovitch 1996: 306).

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This might seem a somewhat fatalistic depiction of the interpreter's fate; however, empirical evidence shows that ELF does indeed have an impact on the demand for conference interpreters. In a study by Chang and Wu (2014), interpreters from 25 conferences in Taiwan were questioned about the effect of ELF on their profession. The results indicate that the increased use of ELF led to fewer assignments for interpreters with combinations other than English-Chinese (e.g. Japanese-Chinese, Korean-Chinese). A survey by Albl-Mikasa (2010) of 32 experienced interpreters in the German-speaking market points to the same conclusion. 81% of the interpreters claimed that ELF affected their profession, and 69% stated that the number of assignments had decreased due to monolingual communication in English. The study also points out that the number of booths - other than those for English and the local language - is being reduced.

These insights indicate that ELF competes directly with conference interpreting. This, however, is not the only ELF-related phenomenon that merits the attention of professional interpreters and researchers. It has been shown that there is a growing number of participants at international conferences who prefer English to their L1, even when interpreting from their language is provided. An early documentation of this phenomenon can be found in a case study by Pöchhacker (1994) investigating a conference comprising 104 speeches, where a considerable number of German speakers chose English for their talks. The preference for English over one's L1 also became apparent in a study by Donovan (2009), where she combined questionnaires with interviews to obtain interpreters' opinions about the effects of English on international communication settings. The results showed that conference participants with higher proficiency in English tend to prefer ELF to their L1; yet, there have only been a very limited number of investigations into speakers' motives for preferring English to their L1.

In its bi-yearly customer satisfaction survey, the *Directorate General for Interpretation of the European Commission* (DG Interpretation) collects data on the quality of interpreting in EU institutions. It also includes a question asking why delegates chose not to speak in their L1 during official sessions, providing various response options. In the 2015 questionnaire, 41% of the respondents claimed that they were "more familiar with the subject of the meeting in another language", 34% thought that the "message [is] better conveyed in a more widely spoken language", 14% were "worried that the interpretation [would] not be accurate", and 10% "did not know whether they could speak their L1"<sup>2</sup>. The survey may indicate some tendencies concerning the research scope of this contribution. However, due to its quantitative design with provided response options, the study does not explore the broad spectrum of possible reasons why

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<sup>2</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/scic/news/docs/css\\_results\\_css\\_2015\\_interpretation\\_presentation\\_final.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/scic/news/docs/css_results_css_2015_interpretation_presentation_final.pdf). (Accessed August 8<sup>th</sup> 2017).

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ELF is preferred. In addition, former editions of the survey stated that a considerable number of respondents did not reply to this question<sup>3</sup>. There is no reason to believe that the response rate was significantly higher in 2015. The survey conducted by DG Interpretation therefore still leaves many questions unanswered, especially when it comes to conference participants' preference for English.

The increasing use of ELF does not only lead to a reducing demand for interpreters. The limited English proficiency of non-native speakers (NNS) is also one of the most cited sources of dissatisfaction among conference interpreters (Albl-Mikasa 2010: 134). Their struggle with NNS can be linked to the additional mental capacities that are necessary to cope with unexpected language structures. In his effort model, Gile (1995) describes how any problem during an interpreter's reception phase requires increased cognitive faculties. Challenges that interpreters face when they interpret NNS include having to "grasp foreign accents and recover unfamiliar expressions, [...] resolve unorthodox syntactic structures and compensate for the lack of pragmatic fluency" (Albl-Mikasa 2013: 192).

According to Setton (1998, 1999) interpreters usually resort to an internal "bilingual phrasebook" to deal with expressions and structures that are frequently used by speakers. These elements of speech can be described as "directly transcodable", as no elaborate process is necessary to convey them. If NNS make less use of those commonly used speech patterns, the implication is that interpreters will have to pay more attention to pragmatic cues and extratextual information in order to make sense of an utterance. The additional cognitive capacities necessary for this process can, in turn, lead to mental overload during subsequent phases, which can ultimately result in inferior quality of target speech. As a consequence, conference interpreters are more likely to feel dissatisfied when working with non-native speakers of English.

ELF as an overall phenomenon therefore poses a number of challenges for interpreters. Not only does the use of it lead to a decreasing number of assignments, but NNS English seems to be much more difficult to process because of improvised expressions that are sometimes heavily influenced by the speaker's L1 (Albl-Mikasa 2013: 206). These considerations might give the impression that ELF can be seen as a deficient medium of communication. House (2010) opposes this conception, however, and argues:

ELF is not a defective, but a fully functional means of communication, and [...] the arguments put forward against ELF come close to an appeal for an outdated prescriptive English native form.

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<sup>3</sup> 93% of the respondents did not answer this question in 2007, 92% in 2010 and 84% in 2013. (see [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/scic/docs/news\\_docs/2014-02-26\\_css\\_2013/scic\\_ccs\\_2013\\_final.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/scic/docs/news_docs/2014-02-26_css_2013/scic_ccs_2013_final.pdf). Accessed August 8<sup>th</sup> 2017)

After all, ELF seems to fulfil important functions in the context of globalisation and intercultural communication. At the same time, interpreters' scepticism about the growing importance of ELF in conference settings also appears understandable, simply because of the competition between these two modes of transcultural communication. Despite this potential bias, criticism of the use of ELF by interpreters should not be ignored, as their job is to facilitate successful communication in multilingual contexts, which makes them essential stakeholders in this respect.

Describing ELF and conference interpreting as two competing modes of communication is, however, not the only way their relationship can be characterised. A study by Reithofer (2013) shows that interpreting can indeed add value to monologic NNS communication. In an experiment, she compared the level of comprehension between an audience that listened to the original speech of a heavily accented ELF speaker and an audience that listened to an interpretation of the speech into their L1. The latter scored significantly higher in a comprehension test following the talk. From these results, Reithofer (*ibid.*: 68) concludes: "For monologic communication, [...] interpreting seems to convey content more effectively."

This section has demonstrated that ELF and conference interpreting compete with one another, as they can be seen as two means to the same end. Additionally, there seems to be a growing number of NNS who prefer to address their audience in English, even if interpretation is available. The study presented in the following section aims to shed light on this issue.

#### **4. Research Questions and Methodology**

This study investigates the motives of conference participants for choosing English over their first language and whether they identify advantages in using their L1. The study thus aimed to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are the reasons that participants at international conferences deliver their talks in English when interpreting from their L1 is available?
- 2) What are the potential benefits of using one's L1 and being interpreted as opposed to ELF, according to conference participants?

In order to address these research questions as comprehensively as possible, this study adopts a qualitative, ethnographic approach which is suggested in *Interpreting Studies* by Hale and Napier (2014: 83-116). In order to obtain empirical data to explore a specific social phenomenon, Bendazzoli (2016: 5) claims that it is essential to "establish some kind of rapport with the members of the community to be analysed".

In order to investigate the reasons why conference participants prefer

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English over their first language, it was necessary to have access to an international conference where speakers could choose between using their own L1 and English. This required that a considerable proportion of participants' first languages be covered by the interpreting service. At the same time, it was crucial to have unlimited access to the conference and to be able to approach as many participants as possible whose insights could be relevant for the study.

The *Model European Union (MEU) 2015* met the above-mentioned requirements. It is an annual event that takes place at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, where students from all over Europe gather to simulate the legislation process of the European Union. Observations prior to data collection revealed that despite the MEU being a conference simulation, it can still be considered representative of a broad range of other international and multilingual events. In the 2015 edition of MEU, 150 participants met between April 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, taking on different roles such as Members of the European Parliament, ministers, journalists, lobbyists and interpreters. The participants represented 34 nationalities, and their age ranged between 19 and 27. The interpreting team covered 9 languages: German, French, Spanish, Polish, Italian, Czech, Slovak and Hungarian. Interpreting into English was always offered via a relay from the respective booths. The interviewees were selected following observations of various debating sessions. Only speakers who had rejected the option of using their L1 were eligible to be interviewed. This required that the respective language had to be offered by the interpreting team.

In total, 20 interviews were conducted with participants from 8 different countries: Germany (7), Italy (5), Spain (2) Poland (2), Austria (1), Czech Republic (1), Slovakia and (1) Hungary (1). The interviews were planned and analysed according to the methodology proposed by Gläser and Laudel (2010). Their method allows researchers to reconstruct social processes that are relevant to the research questions. Gläser and Laudel suggest expert interviews as a method for obtaining particular knowledge from individuals who can give insights into a specific social conduct or phenomenon. They recommend development of an interview guideline based on the research questions and on a model of hypothetical factors that are likely to have an influence on the object to be investigated. The interviews were subsequently analysed according to Gläser and Laudel's approach to qualitative content analysis. In a systematic reading process, thematic codes – ideas or concepts – are generated inductively from raw data. The coding system is then used to structure the data, identify thematic patterns and, ultimately, to apply a higher level of abstraction to the material.

## 5. Results and Discussion

Following the data analysis, the results were grouped and summarised according to the two research questions. In addition to the two core topics, the

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data also permitted investigation of the speakers' perceived ability to express themselves in English.

### *5.1 Reasons why English was preferred over L1*

Following the data analysis, a broad spectrum of potential motives was identified for preferring English to present one's speech. One of the key motivations for choosing English over one's L1 was to directly address the audience without involving a third party. Interviewees claimed that they prefer to be in control of how their utterances reach their listeners. One of the participants expressed this motive in the following way:

I find it strange that my statement doesn't reach the audience exactly the way I expressed it. It always goes through the interpreters. I'm still convinced that they are translating everything correctly, no doubt about that, but the communication is not as direct. (Interviewee B)<sup>4</sup>

What also plays a role in this context is the perceived proneness to errors in interpretation, as well as the subjective feeling that parts of the information can get lost along the way. The risk and the actual occurrence of technical malfunctions also motivated many speakers to choose English and address their audience without the need for interpretation. These remarks are related to the speakers' desire to have control over their statements and be independent of the interpreters. Interviewee N, for instance, used English during her speeches to make sure "that everyone understands me, even if something goes wrong with the interpretation".

Another key reason to choose English was the familiarity with subject-specific terminology in English. This was largely because the participants had mainly dealt with the topics to be discussed at MEU 2015 in English before the conference. One of the speakers made the following comment concerning this issue:

In my experience, it's much easier to use English, because I've never read the legislative proposals in German. I wouldn't even know how to render all of these technical expressions in German. How would I even express that? I would probably have more problems using German in the Parliament than I would have using English. (Interviewee G).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Me parece extraño que mi declaración nunca sea recibida por el público del mismo modo en el que yo la expreso. Siempre pasa por los intérpretes. Aún estoy convencida que ellos la traducen correctamente, de eso no hay duda, pero la comunicación no es tan directa. (Translated by the author)

<sup>5</sup> Also aus meiner eigenen Erfahrung würde ich sagen, es ist für mich einfacher Englisch

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A number of speakers were also under the impression that using one's L1 and relying on interpretation would make the whole communication process unnecessarily complicated. Another considerable number of participants perceived interpreting as an interfering factor that could potentially slow down the whole conference and thereby disrupt the dynamics of the discourse; as Interviewee I pointed out: "It's just easier in English", she further notes: "Everything takes longer with the interpreters involved, and you lose track of the discussion more easily"<sup>6</sup>.

The consistent use of a single language like English, on the other hand, was appreciated by many speakers as a contribution towards smooth functioning of the debate since "the discussion keeps flowing", as Interviewee C observed. She further reported: "Also, you can jump in much easier if you have a quick question". Another factor that seemed to play an important role in choosing English was the social prestige that is attributed to this language:

I have to admit that the language choice at these kinds of events is also a question of status. You get the impression that many speakers want to show the others how good their English is when they take the floor (Interviewee M).

Statements like this one suggest that speakers were under the impression that using English for their addresses would make them appear more confident and more competent. A side effect of using English, therefore, seems to be impressing others with one's language skills. In that context, a high level of English is associated with persuasiveness and self-esteem.

In addition to these factors, a number of other reasons were mentioned by the interviewees but were not given as much emphasis, i.e., relay interpreting was considered problematic, terminological consistency could be ensured through the use of a single language, focus should be on the speakers and not the interpreters, listeners requested that the speaker use English, MEU was seen as a training platform to practice one's rhetorical skills in English, and it is customary to talk in English at international conferences.

It should be noted that interviewees claimed that there was no single motive why they chose English for their speech, but rather a joint set of reasons. Many of them admitted that they were not entirely aware of their exact motivation to use English at the time of their speech but that they had only realised the reasons for their choice during the interview.

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zu verwenden, weil ich hab' die Gesetzestexte auf Deutsch nie gelesen, ich wüsste jetzt auch nicht, wie ich diesen technischen Text jetzt auf Deutsch umwandeln würde. Wie würde ich das ausdrücken? Ich hätte wahrscheinlich mehr Probleme mich auf Deutsch im Parlament auszudrücken als auf Englisch. (Translated by the author)

<sup>6</sup> Auf Englisch ist es einfach einfacher. Mit den Dolmetschern dauert alles viel länger und man verliert in der Diskussion leichter den Faden. (Translated by the author).

### *5.2 Potential benefits of using one's L1*

As well as reflecting on their reasons to use English instead of their first language, the interviewees still identified advantages of using their L1 and being interpreted. The speakers particularly pointed out that people naturally have much better command of their first than their second or third language. These higher linguistic capacities lead to a greater power of verbal expression, which increases one's rhetorical capabilities. By using their L1, speakers can focus fully on their argument, without struggling to formulate a convincing sentence in a foreign language. This, again, makes it possible to focus one's full attention on the subject being discussed without having to worry about foreign language expressions. This seems all the more important at debates with a considerable amount of technical terminology involved:

If think it's great if you can use your own language, especially if the debate becomes rather technical. After all, my Czech is much better than my English and this way I can pay attention to the debate rather than thinking about how I'm going to string my next sentence together (Interviewee P).

Furthermore, the speakers point out that offering interpretation at an international conference makes it much more inclusive in terms of giving everyone the opportunity to address the audience regardless of their English skills. Making interpretation available at a conference can thus be seen as an act of democratisation. For Interviewee D it was a matter of levelling the linguistic playing field for all participants: "Interpreting, in a way, helps us to do our job under the same conditions"<sup>7</sup>.

Speakers claimed that an "English-only policy" would prevent many participants from taking the floor, which could result in many good points not even being raised. One interviewee made the following statement in this context:

If no interpreters are present at a conference, people could get very shy because in many cases they know that their English is not at a good level. Ultimately, they would probably not take the floor as frequently as they normally would, if they could use their mother tongue (Interviewee H).

Some interviewees were under the impression that speakers with a lower level of English could be taken less seriously by the audience, as their speeches tend to be less coherent and convincing. This perception reveals that the power

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<sup>7</sup> Para mí realmente se trata de darle a todos las mismas oportunidades. De alguna forma la interpretación nos ofrece las mismas condiciones de trabajo.

of verbal expression plays a significant role in this context. There is a risk that the point a speaker wishes to make could lose a part of its significance. As a result, the general expectation to use English for a speech had a negative connotation for many speakers. In contrast, the multilingual and multicultural character that was created through offering interpretation added value to the conference. In addition, some participants claimed that interpreters could potentially identify errors in a speech as Interviewee P pointed out: “Another advantage of working with interpreters is that they can correct you when you use wrong names or dates”. Generally, there was broad agreement among the interviewees that making interpretation available at a conference and giving everyone the opportunity to speak their L1 is something to be valued and a true asset at an international event.

### *5.3 Speakers’ power of verbal expression in English and their L1*

In addition to the statements of interviewees concerning their preference for English and the potential advantages of using one’s L1, they also commented on the perceived power of verbal expression of themselves and their peers. This factor seems to be directly linked with the participants’ choice of one language or the other. In this context, there appears to be a contradiction between, on the one hand, speakers’ subjective assumptions of having a good command of English, and on the other hand, the feeling of not doing very well when presenting a speech in this language:

I feel perfectly fine when addressing the plenary in English. I think I don’t really care what language I use [...]. On the other hand, I always think that it’s a pity if for example me or other speakers are sometimes struggling to make a convincing point in English when taking the floor. (Interviewee I)

This comment indicates a contradiction between speakers’ general sense of feeling confident when delivering a speech in English and their dissatisfaction with their actual performance. A similar inconsistency was observed when speakers criticised their peers for not being able to express themselves properly in English, despite their impression that the average level of English at MEU is high. Some interview partners even suggested that a number of speakers would be reluctant to take the floor due to their level of English:

I’m really impressed with the level of English at this event. Everybody seems to be coping very well when giving their speeches in English. [...] of course, many speakers seem to be intimidated, as the level of English is quite unbalanced. Many participants have a

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very confident use of English, while others seem to be afraid of taking the floor because of their language skills (Interviewee C).

This kind of report indicates that the perceived high level of English at an event does not necessarily mean that every speaker feels confident enough to address the audience in English.

## 6. Conclusions

The aim of this contribution was to shed light on the relationship between ELF and conference interpreting from the perspective of young conference participants. The study presented results from qualitative interviews with participants from the *Model European Union 2015* in Strasbourg.

This study focused on the reasons why MEU participants prefer English to their L1 when presenting a speech. The results support some of the findings of the survey conducted by DG Interpretation (see Chapter 3), as familiarity with the subject in English and the impression that the message is better conveyed in a more widely spoken language both seem to play a role in that respect. However, as the study presented in this paper pursued a qualitative approach, it was possible to identify a large number of additional motives to use English for one's speech, such as being independent from the interpreters and the prestige of English, as well as the perceived high practicality of using a single language in a conference setting.

Despite the advantages of using English, the interviewees still identified benefits of using one's L1, such as higher verbal flexibility and being able to better focus on the subject of the debate. However, the study as a whole demonstrates that the benefits of using one's first language are frequently sacrificed for the sake of addressing the audience in English, particularly for the reasons discussed above. This study can, therefore, be seen as a first step to higher awareness of the potential advantages and disadvantages of using ELF and interpreting in the context of international conferences.

The limitations of this study lie in the chosen sample of young conference participants and the fact that the field for data collection was a conference simulation. Future studies on the competitive relationship between ELF and interpreting should be expanded to include a sample of more experienced speakers and conference settings with a more professional focus. Furthermore, it would be desirable to include speakers who deliver speeches in their first language, in order to provide a more balanced picture of the benefits of using one's L1.

As the qualitative approach of this study required a high level of interpretation on the part of the researcher, which implies a certain level of subjectivity, future studies could adopt a quantitative survey design and an

analysis of (interpreted) speeches given by non-native speakers of English. The first approach could shed more light on the distribution of individual motives for preferring one language to another, while the latter could lead to more profound conclusions about the role played by the power of verbal expression in this context.

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## **“Everybody Speaks English Nowadays”. Conference Interpreters’ Perception of the Impact of English as a Lingua Franca on a Changing Profession<sup>1</sup>**

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### *Abstract*

*The unprecedented spread of English as the first global lingua franca for international communication has been identified in the literature on conference interpreting as one of the most significant issues for interpreting today. English as a lingua franca (ELF) is a major force of change for the profession and is generally viewed highly critically by professional interpreters, because it pushes them into a subsidiary role in dealing with multilingual communication.*

*This paper looks at conference interpreters’ perception of the impact of ELF on their profession and the ensuing changes, on the basis of the introspective comments made on ELF in Gentile’s 2016 global survey on interpreters’ self-perception of their professional status. The comments take particular significance from the fact that they picked out ELF as a central theme without any explicit formulation in the questions prompting respondents to do so. This can be taken as a clear sign of the importance interpreters attach to developments related to ELF.*

*Aspects addressed in the answers to the open questions fall into three broad categories: (1) the adverse effects of the spread of ELF on market conditions, (2) a decline in interpreter status and (3) an impoverishment of communication in international encounters. The paper provides a detailed account of the unsolicited qualitative comments on ELF by the respondents of Gentile’s survey and links them back to the results so far produced in the emerging subdiscipline of ITELf (interpreting, translation and English as a lingua franca) (Albl-Mikasa 2017).*

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<sup>1</sup> The present Cultus contribution is the result of a joint and coordinated effort of both authors. To comply with Italian academic rules, the article’s sections were divided as follows: Michaela Albl-Mikasa is the author of sections 1, 2 and 5, Paola Gentile of sections 3, 4 and 6.

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## 1. Introduction

During the last century, conference interpreting used to be a prime choice when it came to dealing with the language issue in multilingual situations. This has changed considerably with the unprecedented spread of English as the first global lingua franca for international communication. As a result, “the predominance of English in conferences and of course in the world at large is probably the single most significant issue for interpreting today” (Donovan, 2011: 7). English used as a lingua franca (ELF) is not only a highly significant, but also a rather negatively connoted issue for interpreting professionals, described as the “top dissatisfaction factor [...] that leaves many interpreters frustrated” (cited in Donovan, 2009: 67) or “the challenge of trying to communicate when speakers hinder communication” (Jones, 2014). In an AIIC-based account, Jones (2014) discusses three main obstacles for the interpreting profession today, namely: (1) “new technologies” (including ICT and remote interpreting), (2) “poor communication skills” on the part of meeting participants, and (3) “the increasing use of international English (“Globish”)”.

These hindrances were echoed in Gentile’s (2016) global survey on interpreters’ self-perception of their professional status, which obtained a total of 805 responses from conference interpreters and 888 from community interpreters<sup>2</sup> around the world. The 805 responses from conference interpreters included 469 answers to open questions. Of these answers, 51 or almost 11%, zeroed in on global English negatively affecting the profession. What is worth noting here is that ELF was picked out as a central theme without any explicit formulation in the questions prompting respondents to do so. The three questions that triggered comments on ELF read as follows:

1. 1. Do you think that the interpreting profession will change in the next few years?
2. 2. In your opinion, to what extent are the following changes likely to occur?

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<sup>2</sup> Numerous names have been used to describe interpreting in public service settings. After controversial debate among the 29 countries in the committee developing the first international standard for community interpreting (the 2014 ISO International Standard 13611), “ISO adopted the term ‘community interpreting’ for the title of the first truly international standard for the profession. It is still the most widely used term today and likely to remain so.” “Community interpreting distinguishes itself from other interpreting professions, including conference, media, escort and military interpreting” with its focus on bilateral, dialogic interpreting in the consecutive mode and the “socio-economic status of the participants and the interpreter’s need to navigate imbalances of power and control” (Bancroft, 2015: 219). It typically occurs in legal, healthcare, social service and educational settings, although many feel that the broad field of legal interpreting is not part of community interpreting and should be dealt with separately (Bancroft, 2015: 220).

- the importance of interpreting will be acknowledged
  - more conference interpreting will be needed
  - more public service interpreting will be needed
  - interpreters will become more visible thanks to social networks
  - fees will progressively decrease
3. 3. Any other comments about your experience or the interpreting profession are greatly appreciated.

This paper provides a detailed account of the unsolicited qualitative comments on ELF made by the respondents of Gentile’s survey and of how professional conference interpreters perceive their profession to have changed or to be likely to change in the future due to the impact of global English. The majority of respondents who explicitly commented on ELF were based in Europe (38), but some also came from Canada (4), the US (2), Peru (2), Mexico (1), Colombia (1), Brazil (1), Argentina (1) and Australia (1). Of the European respondents, 2 were from Switzerland and 36 were from EU countries, namely Belgium (13), Italy (6), the UK (4), Germany (3), Austria (3), France (2), Spain (1), the Netherlands (1), Finland (1), the Czech Republic (1) and Slovakia (1). 38 respondents were female, 12 male. In terms of experience, most participants had been interpreters for over 20 years (33 participants as opposed to 17), which means that they had been in the profession long enough to have witnessed any developments and to found their comments on long-standing experience. The detailed breakdown of the responses is as follows:

Years of experience	Number of respondents	Years of experience	Number of respondents
1-5	2	21-25	9
6-10	2	26-30	5
10-15	2	31-35	7
16-20	11	35+	12
<b>1-20</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>21-40</b>	<b>33</b>

**Table 1: Breakdown into years of experience**

It is also interesting to note that there seemed to be *no difference* between the responses given by the interpreters working for international institutions and those who are active on the private market. This may be due to the fact that even in international institutions, such as the EU, which offers large-scale translation and interpreting services to ensure each speaker’s right to speak their first language, the encroachment of ELF has been unstoppable. For practical and economic reasons, the EU’s policy has moved from “full multilingualism” to “cost-efficient multilingualism” (Albl-Mikasa, 2017: 381). Although Gazzola and Grin highlight that the exclusive use of English would be unfair, since “50% of

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EU citizens aged 15 or more do not speak English” (2013: 102), and that “a multilingual, translation-based language regime is both more effective and more fair than a unilingual regime based on English – even if it is dressed up as ELF” (2013: 104), ELF has been and will continue to be an increasingly omnipresent factor for interpreters in the institutions. This is unlikely to change even in view of Brexit. In his discussion of knock-on effects for other languages on the basis of interviews with EU administrators, interpreters, lobbyists and other institutional representatives, Riley (2017) concludes that a move away from English as a lingua franca in the EU is considered improbable by the interviewees at least in the near future.

The following analysis of responses can, therefore, be considered illustrative of the ongoing changes. In most of the open comments addressing the issue of international English in response to the three questions outlined above, several aspects were specified. These aspects, taken from answers provided by 51 respondents, fall into three broad categories: (1) the adverse effects of the spread of ELF on market conditions, (2) a decline in interpreter status and (3) an impoverishment of communication in international encounters.

## 2. Shrinking markets

Featuring in a total of 19 comments, the most frequently mentioned aspect was the observation of the spread of ELF and the dominance of various Englishes in conference contexts. Fifteen respondents believed this to be unavoidable, since more and more people are multilingual and speak (or believe they speak) English. This was said to be particularly true among executives and the new generation of delegates, who speak or are supposed to speak English.

In this first set of comments, conference participants’ increasing command of English was also associated with financial consequences. Eight respondents mentioned cost-related factors and financial constraints related to the use of ELF. In some cases, ELF, along with the increasing degree of multilingualism leading people to believe that they can do without interpreting, was regarded as the cause of price or interpreter-fee dumping. In other remarks, expenditure cuts in businesses and international organizations were seen to play into the hands of the growing use of (non-native) English, pushing people into communicating in English rather than with the assistance of interpreters. The intertwining of cost-saving and the use of ELF was most drastically expressed in the following comment made by a female Italian AIIC interpreter in the “26-30 years of experience” group:

The private market is shrinking, and we often have to interpret treasurers congratulating themselves on how much money they have saved by not recruiting interpreters and holding meetings in English.

A knowledge of English these days is often a prerequisite to getting any job with international links, and so fewer and fewer private clients see interpreters as a justified expense. Many colleagues feel the profession of conference interpreter will not last longer than a few more decades.

The ensuing decreasing demand and less pressing need for interpreters was the second most frequently mentioned aspect, noted by 18 respondents.

The inexorable spread of global bad English, combined by short-term spending cuts will affect the profession (male Belgian interpreter in the “21-25 years of experience” group).

Many international organisations have now English as their only working language as opposed to several working languages (requiring interpretation at meetings) (female Austrian interpreter with more than 35 years of experience).

Between English becoming the lingua franca (due to globalization) and the universal push to lower costs at all levels, mediocre interpretation is hastening the profession’s decline. There will be far less demand for interpreters and more current users will turn to speaking pigeon English (sic.) rather than pay for what they consider a ‘luxury’. The many unqualified or poor interpreters are a nail in the coffin of the profession (female Canadian interpreter in the “31-35 years of experience” group).

This last comment shows that internal factors, namely interpreters failing to provide the high quality needed to demonstrate the added value that justifies the expense their service entails, may add to external ones, such as the push towards English-only meetings. That the profession might cease to exist due to such developments was expressed by five more respondents, who were “considering other career options” (a female Finnish interpreter with 16-20 years’ experience) or who would not recommend the profession to their children.

### **3. Decline in interpreter status**

The most noticeable effect of the abovementioned developments is a loss in status and lack of prestige, which was expressed in 13 comments. Where interpreters “once met a clear need [they] are now seen as irrelevant to communication” (male Swiss interpreter with more than 35 years of work experience) and “are only very rarely and by very few people looked upon as professionals” (male Italian interpreter with over 35 years of experience). Three

respondents used the expression “necessary evil” to describe the decrease in the acknowledgement of interpreters’ importance. This is also reflected in the deplorable custom of listeners who now tend to “constantly monitor the performance of the interpreters and eagerly correct any ‘mistakes’” (female Finnish interpreter in the “16-20 years of experience” group). This ill-informed and disregarding attitude was also highlighted by the female Italian interpreter mentioned above:

Interpreters are nowadays often seen as a necessary evil in the EU institutions and sometimes an unnecessary expense. The constant checking done by delegations in meetings, with nodding and twitching as we work shows a lack of confidence in our abilities and destroys morale. This is a new phenomenon and is a clear demonstration of our reduced status, even though the job has become far more difficult with increasingly technical subject-matter and large language regimes due to EU enlargement (female Italian AIIIC interpreter in the “26-30 years of experience” group).

Ignorance, misunderstandings and misinterpretations revolving around the interpreter’s task and role are repeatedly mentioned as a cause for the erosion of the interpreter’s status.

The knowledge of English will continue to grow. Many potential users see interpreters as a necessary evil. It is normal that we, as human beings, do not want to be dependent on others. So, most people would prefer to communicate directly in bad English rather than to pay for an interpreter. However, most users are not aware of the enormous cultural gaps that exist (male Belgian interpreter in the “6-10 years of experience” group).

Non-interpreters are usually completely awed when they hear that I am a conference interpreter who does SIMULTANEOUS interpreting (“oh that must be so difficult, I don’t understand how anyone can do that!”). When they hear that I mainly work in the language pair Finnish <> English, their admiration disappears: “But why, everyone speaks English!” (female Finnish interpreter in the “16-20 years of experience” group).

Ill-conceived notions and attitudes relate not only to interpreters, but are also found with respect to ELF speakers’ capacity to live up to the requirements of effective communication, which, despite being the very purpose of meetings and conferences, is safeguarded to an ever lesser extent.

#### 4. Impoverishment of international communication

According to six respondents, people tend to resort to English rather than interpreting based on a general view that “you can negotiate everything in BAD English” (female Spanish interpreters in the “16-20 years of experience” group). This may not apply to high-level meetings, where, for reasons of protocol or national pride, speakers may choose to speak in their own language and rely on interpretation (e.g. the Thai and Indian prime ministers at the UN General Assembly of late). Or there may be cultural differences, whereby, especially in Eastern countries, speakers might also rely on their mother tongue so as not to lose face due to a poor performance. Beyond these aspects, interpreters have observed a growing tendency among speakers using English to rather grossly misjudge their limited English language skills:

If people were really aware of the ridiculous level of broken English they speak, they would realize the intellectually poor image they deliver and choose their mother tongue (female Belgian interpreter in the “21-25 years of experience” group).

Such overestimations are, in fact, a phenomenon repeatedly reported by conference interpreters as documented in Jones’ AICC-based account:

The vast majority of speakers who choose to speak English as a foreign language in international meetings overestimate their competence [...]. Often there are problems with collocations, such that speakers end up being unclear and sometimes even saying the opposite of what they mean. An example of this [...] is that of a very senior politician I heard saying at a high-level meeting, “we must be careful to do this”, when she meant “we should be careful about doing this”, which is of course the exact opposite (Jones 2014).

According to the interpreters, this constitutes a clear obstacle to successful and effective communication:

People think they speak the same language, but it is rarely the case. Interpretation will be important after miscommunication incidents in English. Right now, people think that if everyone speaks English everything will be fine (female Canadian interpreter in the “11-15 years of experience” group).

Interpreters’ unique positioning as “first-hand witnesses to actual language use” and, at the same time, “outsiders to the interests at stake” (Donovan, 2009: 62, 66), lends weight to their statement that ELF speakers regularly “misunderstand [...] each other” (Albl-Mikasa, 2017: 373). Similarly, five

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respondents explicitly voiced their concern about the “English language being slaughtered” (female US-American interpreter with more than 35 years of experience), and they also pointed out that “the richness of communication has suffered from oversimplification of expression” (female Argentinian interpreter with more than 35 years of experience).

In sum, there is a widespread feeling among interpreters that they are trapped in a vicious circle of sorts. As more and more people overestimate and use their English(es) in oversimplified ways, the level of acceptance for relying on ELF rather than interpretation will rise at the expense of effective communication and the intelligent instrumentalization of language. As described in the European Union’s 2016 publication entitled *Misused English Words and Expressions in EU Publications*, this tendency seems to be becoming increasingly institutionalized. Accordingly, MEPs and EU officials tend to use words that do not exist or are relatively unfamiliar to native English speakers. All of these phenomena are already undermining the recognition of the value of professional interpreters.

## 5. A changing profession

Within the interpreting profession, there is a widespread sense that the global spread of ELF in international contexts is changing communication requirements and practices. This is compounded by the rise of new technologies. Eight respondents voiced their concerns about the unholy alliance between ELF and modern internet-based technology. Distant web-based or remote interpreting as well as machine translation are expected to bring about major and unfavorable changes to the profession, which will downgrade a once “much-admired feat commanding high social esteem – and substantial fees” (Pöchhacker, 2011: 322) to a simple commodity in the eyes of the client.

Distant web-based interpreting will make more way; the *commoditisation* of conference interpreting will progress; from and into-English conference work will become even more prevalent (female British interpreter in the “31-35 years of experience” group; our emphasis).

Many executives are learning languages now, especially English, and new technologies are being developed to help the interaction in different languages, not to the extent of replacing the interpreters but my guess is all this will change the scenario somehow (female Peruvian interpreter in the “16-20 years of experience” group).

Much like ELF, new technologies are a rather mixed blessing. While saving time and transportation costs or travel expenses are undeniable advantages of

video conference technology in conference and public service settings (Pöchhacker, 2014; Ehrlich & Napier, 2015), the results of the questionnaire study conducted by Berber revealed that conference interpreters “are more sceptical about the effectiveness of ICTs for their work: some even referring to it as interfering to listening and concentration, or they are altogether against considering ICTs an integral or important part of interpreting” (2008: 202). Moreover, in both conference and community settings, the use of video conference and remote interpreting has been linked to considerably higher stress levels among interpreters (Moser-Mercer, 2003; Tipton & Furmanek, 2016). Additional stress and cognitive load (rather than threats of being made redundant) are among the most prominent disadvantages of ELF and new technologies for interpreters at present.

Another downside is the shift in relevant language combinations, as pointed out in the first quote above. This has also manifested itself in a strong pull towards markets becoming “increasingly two-way – the national language plus English, with a corresponding assumption that interpreters will cover both directions, i.e. provide a retour into their B language” (Donovan, 2011: 14).

I think that it will become a must to have a retour language in the near future. I also think that for certain languages the need for interpretation will no longer be that strong as in certain countries people learn English from early on and are absolutely confident to express themselves in English. I am referring to countries like Sweden, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands (female German interpreter in the “21-25 years of experience” group).

While retour interpreting has long been the standard in countries of lesser-used languages, such as Finland (Beeby Lonsdale, 2009), countries like Germany used to rely to a much greater extent on the provision of multiple language booths and A-language interpreting. One consequence of ELF clearly is a drop in the provision of numerous language combinations at conferences and their replacement with only one language pair, namely the host language and English (Albl-Mikasa, 2017: 370), to the detriment of interpreters without English in their language profile, not to mention linguistic diversity. Against this backdrop, it seems indispensable for interpreters to have a strong B-language and also an English A or B in their repertoire of working languages. The above developments also result in an increased need for a strong entrepreneurial spirit among interpreters, reinforced lobbying and backup from the associations. If interpreters increasingly find they are only needed “to communicate more complex and innovative things” (female Argentinian interpreter with more than 35 years of experience) or “after miscommunication incidents” (female Canadian interpreter in the “11-15 years of experience” group), they are indeed in a

situation where they have to “defend the right to interpreting” (Donovan, 2011: 16) and rise to the challenge that “interpreting must be that much better than muddling through with the *lingua franca*” (Donovan, 2011: 17).

Interpreters are the main cause of the downturn trend in terms of their fees. Totally unable, also within the various societies and associations, to protect themselves (male Italian interpreter with more than 35 years of experience).

Market and working conditions have clearly undergone marked changes so that interpreters can no longer afford to sit idle and wait for assignments to descend on them. This has been expressed in interviews with professionals as well as by the former President of AIIC:

We interpreters know simply too little about our job, about the processes involved in interpreting, the amount of time we invest in the profession in terms of preparatory work and professional development (and what that means in financial terms), about copyright and its consequences, etc., etc. How do you market a product you do not know? (experienced female Swiss interpreter in Albl-Mikasa, 2014: 814).

Translators and interpreters may be highly trained and qualified, but a major challenge for them is how to find work, to market their skills and maintain good working conditions on these changing markets within what is now an industry – said to be amongst the fastest growing in the world. Most colleagues complete academic training with no idea of marketing or business skills, although the law will call them, individually, ‘a small business’ [...] (Linda Fitchett, President of AIIC from 2012 to 2015, in Albl-Mikasa, 2014).

Finally, another major shift on the horizon is the closing of the gap between conference and community interpreting. As conference interpreting becomes more of a niche product due to the developments outlined above and community interpreting grows stronger and more professionalized in the wake of migration and refugee movements, the differences in role, status and remuneration will become blurred. The strict separation between conference and community interpreting assignments may, thus, become a thing of the past.

As in conference interpreting, English is also highly likely to play an increasingly significant role in community interpreting settings in light of the current influx of refugees and spreading command of some English, at least among the younger generations. So far, this issue has been explored mainly by Määttä (2017). In the survey analyzed in this paper, too, only five respondents mentioned English in the 718 qualitative comments made as part of the 888

responses from community interpreters. While this seems to suggest that ELF is not yet a pressing issue among community interpreters, the growing importance of ELF in public service interpreting (PSI) settings is showing its face as rather decisively expressed in one of the five comments:

In Denmark, I could imagine a rise in the number of refugees and (illegal) immigrants needing PSIs. That is: I could envision a future where more users of interpreters request interpreting in languages that are their second or third languages (English, French ...) rather than their first native language (which in Denmark would be more exotic/rarer languages such as African tribal languages and Middle Eastern dialects). As far as I have been hearing, often it is simply not possible to find a qualified interpreter, or indeed any interpreter at all, who can communicate in such languages (female Danish interpreter in the “11-15 years of experience” group).

Moreover, a further two of the five comments addressed clients’ ill-conceived belief that their English proficiency was good enough for them to be able to go without an interpreter.

I often come across people who apologize to me for the inconvenience of calling me in, for example for a police interview. They seem to believe that their own English is proficient enough to do the interview themselves. (To be fair, Danes are generally pretty good at speaking English!) More often than not, 5 minutes in, they realise that they actually need my help after all (female Danish interpreter in the “26-35 years of experience” group).

Until now I had no negative experience with service providers. From time to time the client, who spoke some English, insisted that the presence of the interpreter was not needed (female Norwegian interpreter in the “11-15 years of experience” group).

Another reason why interpreters are deemed much less of a necessity is the frequent view, as expressed in the fourth comment, that migrants “should learn to speak English” (male interpreter from the UK in the “21-25 years of experience” group). Especially in the UK, there is now a government tendency to use this kind of justification for the implementation of cuts in the provision of language services for immigrants (Gentile, 2017). The last comment, finally, made by a female Polish interpreter in the “21-25 years of experience” group, broached the issue of deteriorating native language levels due to the use of ELF.

It should be noted that the five comments mentioned above were unsolicited responses. We assume that a survey explicitly addressing the growing use of English (or French) as a lingua franca in community interpreter-mediated

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settings would yield much richer and highly interesting results. ELF in community interpreting has been identified as a prime topic for investigation in the new translation and interpreting studies (TIS) subdiscipline of ITELF (interpreting, translation and English as a lingua franca) (Albl-Mikasa, 2017).

In fact, in the context of ITELF, a small-scale survey directly addressing ELF in relation to conference interpreting (Albl-Mikasa, 2010) obtained more detailed results, which clearly point to the profession changing under the influence of ELF. Responses came from thirty-two professional interpreters, 23 based in Germany and nine in Switzerland. In the quantitative breakdown, 81% of them felt that globalisation and the spread of ELF had a noticeably adverse effect on their work as an interpreter and 72% that conferences were increasingly two-way and that there was a marked cut in booths for languages other than English. Some 69% reported that the number of interpreting assignments had decreased due to an increase in English-only communication. Most respondents entertained fears regarding the profession's future (59%) or foresaw a noticeable shift from conference to community interpreting (16%). Concerns were less pronounced for those working on the Swiss market and older participants nearing retirement age. Qualitative remarks in response to open questions highlighted negative effects regarding a decline in the demand for interpreters (40%); changing assignment patterns (towards more tele-/video-interpreting, community interpreting, or legal proceedings/depositions and product presentations) (9%); changing contracting behaviour on the part of clients (calling interpreters only for highly complex and technical events) (13%); and a flattening of communication and impoverishment of language (9%). A general sense that interpreters could only subsist by providing a high-quality performance and the utmost professionalism was also demonstrated.

## 6. Conclusion

The above analysis of 51 unsolicited comments on the impact of ELF on the interpreting profession suggests that there are not only considerable concerns among professional interpreters, but also that these concerns are justified. Dropping demand, ignorant or non-appreciative client attitudes, cost-cutting priorities as well as ill-conceived beliefs about communication and language skills are clearly felt to undermine a once highly prestigious profession. The fact that most respondents who expressed their concerns in the comments were women with a postgraduate degree in Translation and Interpreting and the average number of years of experience was in the 21-25 range may be linked to the general trend observed in the 2016 Gentile survey, according to which highly educated female interpreters are less self-assured about their status and have more pessimistic views about the future of the profession than men. At the same time, the (admittedly limited) body of evidence from research efforts on ELF and

interpreting so far (Albl-Mikasa, 2017) seems to suggest that such introspective views of the professionals are backed up by tangible developments which make ELF and new technologies a crucial and precarious issue regarding the considerable changes the interpreting profession is undergoing.

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***ELF as a self-translation practice:  
towards a pedagogy of contact in the Italian  
as a Foreign Language (IFL) classroom***

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*Abstract*

*This research reports on a project which was conducted in Puglia (Southern Italy) from September 2016 to March 2017. It involved a series of lesson observations and interviews with Italian L2 teachers working for the SPRAR project ('Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati') and for some NGOs that cooperate in the regional management of the migrant crisis. The teachers involved in the research project teach Italian as L2 to Multicultural and Multilingual Native Speakers from a variety of countries, who share the legal status of refugees. They are symbolically called upon to serve as the bridge between the cultures the migrants have left behind and the new host culture, which is often perceived as hostile.*

*In line with Canagarajah's translanguaging theory (2013), we maintain that individuals – especially the migrants - are not only capable of but also in need of adapting to new communicative practices in order to negotiate, mediate and adapt to the new changing paradigms of the contemporary world. The paradigm of 'superdiversity' (Vertovec 2007) helps us to consider that the emerging phenomena of translanguaging social contact generated by globalisation, mobility and migration is encouraging the proposal of new theoretical and practical concepts. The deterritorialised and transidiomatic 'supergroup' (Vertovec, 2007; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011) of IFL (Italian as a Foreign Language) teachers and their migrant students represents the complex arena of new social and linguistic research debates, since it problematises the relationship between linguistic communities and nation-states, and between the systematic knowledge of languages and their relationships to other cultures.*

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<sup>1</sup> Although the authors conceived the paper together, Annarita Taronna is mainly responsible for the Introduction and section 2; Section 3 and Conclusions were written by Lorena Carbonara. The authors wrote Section 4 together.

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## 1. Introduction

The cultural turn in linguistic studies, begun in the 1980s, has led to a shift of focus from merely linguistic issues – centred on the study of words and/or texts – to the idea of language intended as an essential part of a broader cultural, literary, historical and ethical-anthropological system. More specifically, both the new and ongoing migration flows and older diasporas and colonial experiences point towards a gradual reconsideration of concepts such as language, translation, belonging, mobility, contact, nation, identity and community, as well as towards an analysis of the socio-linguistic and cultural implications for the countries on the receiving end. Among the advocates of the change, this study will take into consideration the socio-linguists Vertovec, Blommaert and Rampton and the linguists Seidlhofer, Pennycook and Canagarajah who, although from different perspectives, investigate linguistic forms and communicative strategies adopted within diasporic communities, migrant groups or contexts marked by the local, national and global circulation of people, goods and cultures. The *fil rouge* associating their research works is, first of all, a new conception of language as a place to be shared and a border to be crossed, determining phenomena such as hegemonic power relations between territories and their inhabitants.

For the specific purposes of this research, theoretical speculation will revolve around the emergence of new routes for the description and interpretation of a reality that unfolds before our eyes, with the aim of reconsidering the role of English from a hegemonic to a contact language. Such a passage decrees the end of monolingualism and of the purist idea of language as an ideological construction, historically rooted and marked by the borders of the nation-state. While moving around the world, English has generated a great number of varieties, some of which are already recognised and taught as standards (e.g. American English, Australian English etc.), while others are currently being recognised and standardised (e.g. Indian English, Caribbean English, some African varieties of English etc.). However, what makes the current scenario completely different from the colonial one is the migrations that characterise our era and that allow a growing degree of contact between people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In this context, English and its varieties seem to converge in what Canagarajah (2013) defines as a “translingual practice” that, while recognising norms and conventions imposed by dominant institutions and social groups, values the possibility for the speakers to negotiate such norms in relation to their own repertoires and translingual practices. In this kind of context, since languages are not necessarily in conflict but indeed complementary, their interrelation has to be established in more dynamic terms, overcoming the intrinsic binarism of labels like mono/multi, mono/pluri, mono/poly.

Canagarajah’s motto, “we are all translinguals,” means that we all speak a bridge language, a flexible, contingent, unstable language, suited to the

cooperative co-construction of meaning, with the final purpose of achieving successful intercultural interaction. This implies that ELF is a moving and transforming variety that follows the flow of migrant and diasporic subjects passing through borderlands and resorting to individual English varieties in their interactions. Against this background, it is possible to observe the formation of new geo-localities and linguistic identities, contaminated by multiple global cultural flows, which escape neo-colonial dystopias and hegemonic discourses on language abuse and extinction, and to embrace new practices of linguistic and cultural crossover. On these premises, the overall purpose of the paper is indeed to show how ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) can be used as a translingual practice within a specific ‘contact zone’, such as a course of Italian as a Foreign Language (IFL) for refugees and asylum seekers from war zones, extremely poor areas and other places experiencing a state of emergency. More specifically, this research aims, on the one hand, to analyse the various linguistic and communicative forms generated in the interaction between the IFL teacher and foreign students through the use of ELF; on the other, to show how the passage of English from hegemonic language to contact language leads to a re-thinking of the relevance of an exclusively monocentric model, based on the notion of the native speaker and of a largely Anglo-centric lingua-cultural dominance. In fact, the linguistic reflections which will be traced here serve to foster an innovative theoretical and methodological approach, which shall include discussions of plurality, pluricentrism and polyhedral contexts of use that characterise English nowadays. The awareness of the need for alternative methods able to challenge the hegemonic and monolithic conception of English is the only way to promote new models of transcultural communication in the various ELF contexts of use; those contexts, in fact, constitute concrete evidence of the existence of English varieties as forms of “active functional variation” (Preisler, 1999: 260).

## **2. Theorising ELF as a translingual practice in migratory settings**

Over the last twenty years, phenomena such as mobility and migration have completely transformed the configuration of society and its demographic, socio-political, cultural and linguistic settings. The unstoppable flow of bodies, goods and cultures has led the zones crossed to adopt a radical diversification process in economic, religious, ethnographical and geo-political terms. The characteristics and dynamics generated by this process stripped off the rhetoric of multiculturalism and the melting pot which, until then, had focused on diversity as the pivotal theoretical issue for linguistics, sociolinguistics and ethno-linguistics.

Looking at these new conditions, the social anthropologist Steven Vertovec coined the term ‘superdiversity’ (2007) to define the complexity generated by the

migratory experience in the United Kingdom starting from the 1990s, and to highlight the change of migratory models:

[superdiversity] is a notion intended to underline a level and kind of complexity surpassing anything the country has previously experienced. Such a condition is distinguished by a dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants who have arrived over the last decade (2007: 1024).

The new paradigm marked by superdiversity became epochal in those years, as it portrayed an unprecedented process of “diversification of diversity” (ibid. 1025). While previously migrants to the United Kingdom came largely from ex-colonies, starting from the 1990s there was an increase of ‘new immigrants’ that did not fit in any of the existing, static conceptions of ethnicity. This transnational/creole model represents a development and a rift that is in contrast with the adaptive varieties of the old model; in fact, it concerns processes of hybrid and syncretised identity-making in which the cultures, values and norms of the receiving territories are grafted onto the main features of the place of origin. As it will be explained in greater depth in section 3, dedicated to the use of ELF as a self-translation practice in classes of Italian as a Foreign Language, the sense of belonging to the place of origin of the learning immigrants is fostered by linguistic practices that allow for ongoing relations between the two lands and a growing awareness of bifocality (Vertovec, 2004) for the subjects involved.

The paradigm of superdiversity is also an epistemological one, considering that the emerging phenomena of social contact and diversification generated by globalisation, mobility and migration also encouraged the proposal of new concepts, replacing that of ‘speech community’. One example is the term ‘supergroups’ to define deterritorialised and transidiomatic communities of speakers that move within the new scenario of superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011). These ‘supergroups’ – an example of which may be the one that includes Italian teachers and the immigrant learners who which may be made up of Italian teachers, as well as the immigrant learners who reciprocally resort to ELF while teaching and learning ILF – represent new social and linguistic groups that problematise the relationship between the notions of “linguistic community” (intended as a form of cultural development) and “nation-state” (intended as a political institution). In particular, superdiversity introduces a multi-dimensional fluidity and activates a movement that goes beyond the idea of language as a predefined structure, seeing it as the product of a practice and of a reiterated social activity – thus imagining identity as a variable characteristic that is moulded through the interaction with the other. On such

premises, we may introduce some of the research questions that inspired this work: how does the emerging geo-linguistic role of ELF in migration contexts move away from the standard, often defined as ‘proper’ English?; what are the implications for language teaching in contexts of language contact involving ELF, the host languages and the repertoires of the L1s spoken by immigrant learners?

Given the present scenario, characterised by the constant evolution of the linguistic models available for the speakers and by the heterogeneity of the contexts of its use, it is nowadays counterproductive to cling to the idea of ‘proper English’ or to perpetrate a hierarchical vision of ‘Englishes’ in which some are more valid than the others. Once we have become aware of the dynamics that led to the international spread of English, we might agree with Rajagopalan (2004: 11), who provocatively states that “English has no native speakers,” thus marking a sort of transfer of property from its (former) native speakers to its new speakers. In this context, it may seem legitimate to wonder what standard English (which some influential linguists like Widdowson (2003: 27) define as ‘proper English’) really is:

We can talk about proper English in terms of conformity to encoding convention. But this is not the only answer. We can also think of words being in their proper place with reference to their communicative purpose. Here we are concerned not with the internal relationship of words as encoded forms, but with the external relationship of words with the context of their actual occurrence, and propriety is not now a matter of their correctness of form in a sentence, but of their appropriateness of function in an utterance.

Hence, ‘proper English’ is defined as the ‘right’ way of speaking English, accepted as a model of correctness and appropriateness for successful communication. However, the expression ‘proper English’ is also used with a broader acceptance to define both a group of speakers and a set of linguistic practices regarded as correct, standard and central. Such a perspective helps understand the reason why the supporters of this model strongly disapprove of the use of ELF, demonising the fact that it resorts to simplified forms of English, that it is also culturally neutral and that it is believed to generate endless problems because of what is looked upon as impoverished lexicon, inaccurate phonetics and semantics – allegedly a cause of lexical and grammatical ambiguity. For these reasons, each linguistic variety that has emerged over time – which will subsequently be discussed in this work – as an alternative to standard English has been derogatorily defined as ‘broken English’ or ‘English with an accent’: expressions aimed at stressing the risk associated with these varieties: to spoil and corrupt the pure variety that belongs by right to the so-called ‘natives’.

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The perspective adopted here to reread the concepts of language and linguistic community concretely highlights the complexity of ELF as a translocal, transcultural and translingual practice, through which social actors living and enlivening the communities can creatively co-construct and negotiate the meanings of their interactions, innovating networks and social categories, across communicative genres and territorial borders. In this scenario, the plurality of languages – and consequently their comparison and reciprocal translation – is today given new visibility thanks to migration. Being hospitable and recognising the rights of the immigrant – the right to asylum, health, education, work and citizenship – also concerns the immigrant’s language, which is a depository of identity, memory and belonging. For those who migrate, preserving this relationship with their inherited language means being able to interact with the people in the host country on the basis of their own culture. In these specific migration contexts, ELF can be used as a contact language – as happens every day in language mediation practices for asylum seekers – maintaining language features and efficient strategies that preserve the presence of other languages and cultures, thus enabling speakers to feel aware of equality in communication, of pluralism and of the basic linguistic and cultural rights they are entitled to.<sup>2</sup>

Since its origins, ELF has provided a tool for communication among people of different linguistic backgrounds (Jenkins 2000; 2007; Seidlhofer et al. 2006, Guido & Seidlhofer, 2014) who choose English as a Foreign Language (EFL) for intercultural communication. This approach is different from the study of English as a foreign language, which is tightly bound to its British historical origins. While EFL is acquired with the purpose of approximating the native variety of English, ELF represents a supplemental linguistic system that results from language contact and evolution where at times the number of languages and cultures in play are no longer numerable or identifiable (Cogo, 2009). Communicative situations, like the ones analysed in sections 3 and 4, see English used as a lingua franca and are thus intrinsically plurilingual, as at least two different linguistic codes are involved at any one time: the L1 of each speaker and English. In this kind of contexts, the meaning is consequently co-constructed through strategies of interaction that are mainly cooperative and aimed at adjustment. Given the intercultural nature of those contexts, the participants deploy all the resources of their plurilinguistic and pluricultural repertoires in order to communicate effectively. This implies that the conventionality of the

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<sup>2</sup> This perspective is linked to the theoretical paradigm recently elaborated by the Japanese sociologist of communication Yukio Tsuda (2008), who describes a global society structured hierarchically, where native speakers of English dominate, followed by those who have it as a L2 or learn it as a foreign language, and at the bottom, those who cannot speak the language at all. In particular, to contrast the threat represented by the use of English as hegemonic, Tsuda proposes the concept of an ‘ecology of languages’, which implies education to multilingualism.

norms of standard English can be altered, mediated or negotiated on the basis of specific communicative needs, as stated by Hülmbauer (2013: 55):

Conventionality, which is native-speaker related, loses some of its importance when we are concerned with intercultural speaker communities. In a shift of focus from correctness towards communicative effectiveness, also the use of conventionalised encoded items such as collocations, idioms, and grammatical idiosyncrasies is re-evaluated as problematic among intercultural speakers.

In most cases, the non-conventional use of the language does not generate misunderstandings; indeed, the meaning can become even more explicit, for example with the insertion of clarifying elements (e.g. ‘black colour’, ‘discuss about’, ‘return back’) or with the creation of ‘unusual’ words formed by derivation (e.g. ‘unformal’, ‘bigness’, ‘increasement’) (Seidlhofer, 2011:143-145). Nevertheless, simplification is only one of the adjustment strategies enacted to facilitate communication. Others include morphological adaptation through the use of simpler grammatical structures, lexical repetition aimed at clarification and explicitness, reassuring pronunciation and voice tone, the slowing down of speech, reduction of sentence length and the increase of pauses (Mauranen, 2007).

Thanks to the contribution of Jenkins, Cogo and Dewey, the state of the art of ELF has been marked by further efforts to systematise its main features and phonological, lexical, grammatical-lexical and pragmatic peculiarities. In particular, from a phonological point of view, ELF speakers use strategies of phonetic adjustment in order to facilitate the task of their interlocutors. Among these, some were classified by Jenkins (2000) as crucial, or LFC (Lingua Franca Core), namely the adjustment of fricatives /θ/ and /ð/, of initial consonant clusters, of the length of vowel sounds and of accents.

On a lexical and grammatical-lexical level, Seidlhofer (2004) provided a broad description of the main features of current ELF, which may be summarised as follows: loss of final -s on the verb of the third person singular in the present simple; the interchangeable nature of the relative pronouns *who* and *which*; the omission of definite and indefinite articles where they would be compulsory in English as a Native Language (ENL), as well as the insertion of articles where they would not be required in ENL; the insertion of redundant prepositions in sentences like ‘we have to study about...’; excessive and repetitive use of semantically generic verbs such as *make*, *have*, *put*, *take*; the replacement of infinitives with subordinates starting with ‘that’, e.g. *I want that* (instead of *I want to...*).

From a pragmatic point of view, the mutuality of construction and comprehension of meaning in interaction was the first feature of ELF to be

examined in the studies carried out by Firth (1996), House (1999) and Meierkord (2004). The research on ELF evolved by focusing on the negotiation and resolution of misunderstandings as a crucial aspect for successful communication among non-native speakers. In these cases, ELF interlocutors need a specific interactional and pragmatic competence in order to promptly signal a lack of understanding and not to interrupt the communication flow. To this end, certain pragmatic strategies are activated – such as repetition, explanation, self-reparation and paraphrasing – which can be adopted in various interactional contexts, e.g. after a long pause, a very short answer or an overlapping statement, so as to safeguard mutual comprehension and intelligibility. Another recurrent pragmatic strategy is the collaborative construction of meaning through more or less explicit linguistic practices such as ‘code-switching’ or the use of synonyms.

However, adjustment strategies also include extra-linguistic components, such as those related to body language (e.g. smiling eyes, body direction, gestures, facial expressions) and behaviour, for example ignoring mistakes and redundancies. Hesitation or pauses are often used in conversation as strategies for the reparation, clarification or contextualisation of a specific misunderstanding, in line with what Firth (1996) calls the ‘let it pass’ and ‘make it normal’ principles. Both linguistic and extra-linguistic strategies reinforce the role of English as a dynamic language, because intergroup contact produces transformations and proves the vitality of language communities (or speaker communities), bringing out the adaptive and resilient nature of culture.

In migration contexts, ELF can be adapted to the situation, or vice versa, thus allowing for the activation of multiple identities in interactional contexts and discursive practices. This dynamicity characterises the ability of the ELF speaker to act through language both in his/her country of origin and in that of arrival or, more generically, to construct alternative identities within ‘third spaces’: ones that do not coincide with national borders. Numerous linguists, sociolinguists, ethno-linguists and language anthropologists have felt the need to highlight the hybrid, plural and fragmentary nature of the identities shaped by the globalised world, as well as to define them with terms and concepts that are literally or metaphorically linked to the idea of acting with language. Among them, Jacquemet (2005) elaborates the concept of ‘transidiomaticity’, with reference to transidiomatic practices that help to negotiate – rather than to mandate – the linguistic norms that incorporate agency, locality and speaker’s context in the complexity of interaction:

Transidiomatic practices are the results of the co-presence of multilingual talk (exercised by de/reterritorialized speakers) and electronic media, in contexts heavily structured by social indexicalities and semiotic codes. Anyone present in transnational environments, whose talk is mediated by deterritorialized technologies, and who interacts with both present and distant people, will find herself

producing transidiomatic practices (2005: 265).

An emblematic and concrete example of transidiomatic practices is the use of ELF in migration contexts, where the issue of the self is at the core, along with the possibility for those speaking English to *creatively* negotiate the place, space and belonging of English with their lives proposing an alternative model to the national communities.

The creation and spread of linguistic models that shed light on migration-related intercultural communication legitimise the theorisation of contact and complexity linguistics as part of this research. Although each of the aforementioned definitions is referred to specific contexts of use, they all share a common aim: to describe linguistic practices that go beyond the ideological frameworks imposed by the nation-state. In this scenario, ELF becomes a place for change, adaptation and formulation; indeed, it embodies what Canagarajah (1999: 2) called the ‘resistance perspective’, through which those who use English as a contact language “may find ways to negotiate, alter and oppose political structures, and reconstruct their languages, cultures, identities to their advantage”. The purpose of this research is to re-imagine English in more inclusive, ethical and democratic terms, as a lingua franca and contact practice. According to such a perspective, English should not be studied as a foreign language, nor should it be associated with western culture only; rather it should become a translangual practice spoken by migrant, diasporic or post-colonial subjects that live in or across borderlands and make use of individual varieties of English in their everyday interactions.

### 3. ELF as a self-translation practice in IFL classrooms

This research reports on a project that was conducted in Puglia (Southern Italy) from September 2016 to March 2017. It involved a series of lesson observations and interviews with Italian L2 teachers working for the SPRAR project (*‘Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati’*) and for some NGOs that cooperate in the regional management of the migrant crisis. It was divided into four main phases based respectively on:

1. the formulation of the research hypotheses and the questionnaire;
2. interviews with teachers;
3. class observations;
4. data analysis.

The following table is a sample of the questionnaire used to conduct the semi-structured interviews with the teachers. Since the conversations with them offered a variety of meaningful insights, questions and answers cannot be

condensed into a formal grid. The teachers responded with enthusiasm to the challenge of examining their own teaching practices, sharing with the interviewers their reflections on both theoretical knowledge and actual practice. This process required a certain degree of critical reflection and awareness of the ways the interviewers/researchers and teachers represent themselves and others, both linguistically and culturally, with specific attention to the cases in which the so-called ‘marginalized’ – in this case the migrants – are involved. In line with the reflexivity trend, which is spreading across many academic fields, as Byrd Clark and Dervin point out, the work was grounded on the assumption that research/teaching practices should constantly be questioned. In Byrd Clark & Dervin’s words:

Awareness [...] appears to carry with it at least three issues/aspects: (1) the betterment of the human being/citizen/person through research and/or lived experiences and learning about one’s self via others, (2) something to overcome, and (3) a need to become aware of the illusions of the social world as well as our own representations and engagements with them (Byrd Clark & Dervin, 2014: 23).

Indeed, it is outstanding the belief that our research/teaching practices may contribute to the betterment of the citizen and the community since they are meant to work for the overcoming of cultural and racial prejudices, and for a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play in the multicultural world we live in as researchers, teachers and people. The questionnaire thus served as a kind of guideline to conduct the interviews, which were influenced by contingent factors, such as the emotions and feelings expressed by the teachers, their degree of involvement in their students’ socio-cultural conditions, and the response to all this in terms of theoretical awareness (the majority of the teachers interviewed possesses a certificate for teaching Italian as L2 and/or a university degree in Foreign Languages or Political Science) and of personal motivation and attitude.

**Questionnaire Sample:**

<u>Personal data</u>	<u>Specific questions</u>	<u>Other</u>
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Gender:	Number of students in each	Reflect on:
Name and Surname:	class:	- self-translation
Place of birth:	Age (average):	practices;
Education:	Gender (%):	- strategies used for
Previous Experience:	Nationalities:	accommodation, simplification
Experience abroad:	Motivation:	and management of
Motivation:	Course organisation (levels,	intercultural conflicts;
Recruitment:	materials and tests):	- use of elements of
Languages Spoken:	Use of ELF:	Italian/foreign culture.

The teaching/learning dynamics at play in the language classroom have been described through the use of a variety of figures, images and metaphors over time. Over the last thirty years, they have been mostly supported by and supporters of the idea that the teachers' aim should be the creation of the conditions for learning, as they do not merely transfer information and knowledge to the students. Among the scholars that have focused research on this subject, Northcote offers a summary of the most popular metaphors related to teaching/learning practices in a 2006 article, where she provides the following table (2006: 253).

### Northcote's table (2006)

**Table 1: Some previously reported metaphors for teaching and learning**

Type of metaphor	Metaphor	Research studies
Epistemological metaphors	Learning as a process of receiving knowledge. Knowledge as objects. Mind as a container.	Brownlee (1998, 2001), Dunkin and Precians (1992), Archer (1999), Chan (2000), Jehng, Johnston and Anderson (1993), Bereiter (2000)
Construction metaphors	Learning as pulling it all together. Learning as building understandings. Learner is a builder.	Munby and Russell (1990), Van Patten, Chao and Reigeluth (1986), Hager (2004)
Coaching metaphors	Teacher as coach. Learner as a player.	Hopper (1999), McShane (2002), Curtner-Smith (1997)
Acquisition and participation metaphors	Learner as a sponge, a collector Learner as contributor. Learner as participant.	Hildebrand (1999), Sfard (1998)
Interaction, change and persuasion metaphors	Teaching as persuasion. Learning is a process of conceptual change. Learning as growth.	Fives and Alexander (2001), Koschmann (1999), Hager (2004), McShane (2002), Murphy (2001)
Metaphors that cite teachers and learners as artists	Learning as creative construction and personal enlightenment. Teacher as performer.	Epp (1999), McShane (2002)

The abovementioned coaching, acquisition and participation metaphors seem to be the most appropriate in the context of migration since motivation and participation play a big role in such language classrooms. In this context, the teaching/learning practice acquires new meaningful elements that are related to the autobiographical and self-translation dynamics at play. The teaching/learning

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practice is inevitably influenced by the environment in which teachers and students find themselves, such as the location and size of the classrooms, the number of students in class and the constant arrival and departure of people, the critical situation of students in terms of post-traumatic syndromes and their political/social status. We maintain that the constant act of self-translation, which is unavoidable in such multilingual contexts, can be seen as a possibility to explore multilingualism and hybridity, a way to give voice to plural autobiographies, reflecting a world “where every day millions of individuals, out of choice or necessity, translate themselves into different cultures and languages” (Cordingly, 2013: 6).

In a recent study, Zamboni concentrates on another popular metaphor used to define the class environment, that of ‘bridging’ between cultures, and she focuses on the definition of Multicultural and Multilingual Native Speakers (MMNSs). She states that: “Having moved from the country where they were born and raised into a new and often foreign geographical and cultural environment, MMNSs inhabit a mediated space between two cultures” (2014: 18). The teachers involved in our research project teach Italian as L2 to MMNSs from a variety of countries, who share the legal status of refugees. They are symbolically called upon to serve as the bridge between the cultures the migrants have left behind and the new host culture, which is often perceived as hostile. We have selected six cases that will represent our case study:

1. two teachers in Bari (SPRAR/ARCI);
2. two teachers in Lecce (SPRAR/ARCI);
3. one teacher in Taranto (Centro d’Accoglienza/Salam NGO)
4. one teacher in Martina Franca (SPRAR/Salam NGO).

In five out of six cases, the students of the language courses are migrants enrolled in the national SPRAR project; they are adults, couples or families, aged between 18 and 50 (plus two cases of people over 60). Only in one case are the students all minors, residents at the local ‘*Centro d’Accoglienza*’. The teachers interviewed are Italian women;<sup>3</sup> they speak at least one European language (English and/or French) and use it in class to build bridges with their students; in one case, the teacher also speaks Arabic. The students come from Bangladesh, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Senegal, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, Ghana, Mali and Northern Africa and they can be divided into three major groups: Anglophones, Francophones and Arabophones. In this study, we will concentrate on the Anglophones as their second language, whatever their regional or national idioms, is English. But firstly, some general considerations are needed.

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<sup>3</sup> Antonella Petrera, Giusi Aglieri, Federica Gargiulo, Angelica Lillo, Alessandra Apollonio and Roberta Antonacci are the teachers cited in this article as part of our case study.

All the teachers involved in the interviews declare they use ELF in class; sometimes, it is also supported by French, and in one case by Arabic. They all state that the use of ELF decreases as the learners reach a higher level of proficiency in Italian (A2 is the maximum level achieved). They all agree that the presence of a lingua franca is necessary for either achieving the objective of the lesson (i.e. the explanation of a grammar rule), or creating a positive welcoming environment for the students. Hospitality, as stated in the previous section, is achieved by acknowledging the presence of other languages in class apart from English, and by fostering equality in communication. Indeed, the communicative approach that each teacher uses takes into account the autobiography of the students. It is important to highlight that the learners in this context are not considered only as students but that they are always referred to as '*beneficiari*/beneficiaries', since they are the recipients of a complex governmental project including the language course as part of a set of measures designed to foster integration. The project actions are described as follows:

[...] they go beyond the mere distribution of bed and board, foreseeing also a degree of information, accompaniment, assistance and orientation through the construction of individual paths of socio-economic insertion.<sup>4</sup>

Since they are involved in such a complex network of relationships and inspired by the general mission of the SPRAR project, all the teachers share the belief that autobiography and self-translation play a crucial role in such multilingual and multicultural classes, particularly because of the personal backgrounds of the students/beneficiaries. They report that autobiographical aspects emerge over the course of the lessons with a certain degree of difficulty, since the students share the experience of migration from wars and persecutions and, as stated by all the teachers, do not readily talk about the journey to Italy. Yet they show a high degree of pride when they are asked about where they come from and what their native language is.<sup>5</sup> Self-translation becomes crucial since it is both linguistically and symbolically necessary: students translate constantly from their mother tongues into ELF or Italian, and teachers constantly translate from Italian into ELF; furthermore, the students' autobiographies have to be symbolically translated into the host culture.

The use of the students' native languages – meaning they either teach the teachers some expressions in their own mother tongues or the teachers already know them – is considered an important element for the construction of a positive environment in class, i.e. a prerequisite for hospitality. One of the teachers reports as follows on the use of a 'class pidgin', an inter-language that

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.sprar.it/la-storia>, consulted 27/02/2017. Translation mine.

<sup>5</sup> From the interview with Federica Gargiulo, February 2017.

she shares with her students and that may be considered a ‘translingual practice’ in Canagarajah’s terms:

‘How far?’ and ‘Abi?’, which respectively mean ‘How are you?’ and ‘Ok?/Isn’t it?/Right?’ in Nigerian pidgin, are used among us all to interact with each other. It’s fun and it makes us feel a team because we don’t use these expressions outside the classroom with other people.<sup>6</sup>

The creation of a ‘third space’, in Bhabha’s terms, whether voluntary or involuntary, becomes fundamental for the establishment of intimacy between the teacher and her students (1994). This ‘language of the heart’<sup>7</sup> (i.e. the above mentioned ‘class pidgin’ or the use of the students’ native languages in class) fosters the condition for learning and works as a strategy of hospitality and mutual integration.<sup>8</sup> The language that students speak when they are not talking to the teacher is mainly their native language, as they usually sit in national groups in class (especially when rooms are large and they sit around big tables). Otherwise, they use the pidgin they brought with them from the experience of migration. The most interesting example encountered is the expression ‘sim-sim’, which is used by all the students, no matter what their country of origin is, to express the concept of ‘the same/*lo stesso*’.<sup>9</sup> We suppose that, over the course of the journey, the need to relate to people speaking a variety of foreign languages and the urge to communicate in the conflict zones fostered the construction of an oral lingua franca based on English.

Collecting other expressions like this is not easy since, as previously said, the experience of the journey represents a delicate topic for all the students. According to the teachers, the trauma of the journey across the Mediterranean shapes the students’ lives, and they often start the narration of their migration experience with their arrival at Lampedusa. Especially in the case of minors, the teacher reports a great difficulty in the explanation of vocabulary related to home and family.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, all the teachers consider the narration of parts of their own autobiography necessary for the construction of empathy and trust as well as an opportunity to talk about intercultural encounters, as defined by the Council of Europe’s White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue ‘Living together as equals in dignity’.<sup>11</sup> When we asked them if they use autobiography as a contact strategy, we collected a series of interesting examples:

<sup>6</sup> From the interview with Giusi Aglieri, February 2017.

<sup>7</sup> From the interview with Angelica Lillo, February 2017.

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix for examples of the support intercultural visual material present in some of the classes.

<sup>9</sup> From the interviews with Alessandra Apollonio and Roberta Antonacci, March 2017.

<sup>10</sup> From the interview with Federica Gargiulo, February 2017.

<sup>11</sup> See [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/autobiography/default\\_en.asp#lien\\_inactif](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/autobiography/default_en.asp#lien_inactif), consulted

- 1) “We talked about marriage, as I am going to get married soon, and we took the chance to talk about polygamy and monogamy in our various cultures;”
- 2) “When I meet them the first day, I say I have two kids, they like the fact you don’t have problems talking about yourself, but I noticed that if they are asked about their family it becomes painful;”
- 3) “When they get to know me well, they may start talking about their past and the narration is always using ELF; they use ELF to make sure I understand;”
- 4) “Once I told a student who was sick to go and breathe some sea air and she replied that she hates the sea because of what happened to her. I realised I have to be careful about what I say to them.”<sup>12</sup>

During the observations, we noticed that the teachers constantly shift from Italian into English or French, and some of the most proficient students (both in English or French and Italian) play the part of interpreters for the others, offering explanations and translation when needed. Among other pragmatic strategies, as illustrated in the previous section, code-mixing (by students) and code-switching (by teachers) are widely present, and they represent the result of the constant self-translation that each actor in the class performs. We maintain that these acts of self-translation are the expression of the self’s “complex web of tensions produced by its multilingual dialogue within itself” (Klimkiewicz, 2013: 190).

Here are some examples of code-switching, generalisation/simplification and first-language interference:

- 1) Teacher: “Questo è il verbo *venire*, to come, right? *Allora, X scrivilo alla lavagna*, “come here!”
1. Anglophone student: “What does it mean *‘apprendista*”? Teacher: “It means ‘learner.’”
2. Anglophone student: “*Frequento una straniera scuola.*” (Interference from English)

In the first example, the teacher consciously switches from Italian into English to motivate the student she is talking to, and she considers English as an anchor or a bridge. In the second example, the teacher opts for a lexical generalisation/simplification to translate the specific term *‘apprendista*’, in the attempt to provide the student with an easy-to-understand definition. In the third case, the student’s background knowledge of English interferes with his accuracy in Italian when resorting to the inverted word order concerning “una straniera

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24.02.2017.

<sup>12</sup> For the sake of privacy, we will not state the teacher’s name where detailed personal information is given.

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scuola”. These aspects will be treated in greater depth in the next section, where we will illustrate the transition from the use of what can be likened to a form of ‘foreigner talk’ to the proximity-based approach or mitigation strategy.

The most common ELF expressions used in class, either reported by the teachers or directly observed, are: ‘try’, ‘try again’, ‘read’, ‘understand?’, ‘don’t understand’, ‘have I been clear?’, ‘what’s the meaning of... in English?’, ‘in Italian, the meaning of this is...’, ‘in Italian, we say/do...’. This shows how ELF – which we consider to be the contact language *par excellence* – is mainly used for giving commands (clarity), checking the phatic function, assuring that communication is working and that contact is established and maintained among the participants in the communicative situation (efficacy). The ‘side effect’ of the use of ELF in such a functional way is nevertheless the creation of a positive learning environment where students are involved in a multilingual process of self-translation. Of course, this is possible where no one is excluded from the communicative situation due to a lack of English competence, as in the case of the Francophone and Arabophone groups, and it should never interfere with the learning of Italian. A balanced use of Italian, ELF and of the students’ native languages should be seen as an opportunity to overcome the constraints of monolingualism, in line with what Canagarajah defines as a translanguaging practice (2013), examined extensively in the previous section.

Some concluding remarks are necessary to prepare the ground for future research developments. The state of the art of migration in Puglia, as far as linguistic integration and the use of ELF are concerned, reveals that the majority of IFL teachers are qualified to teach Italian as L2 or, if not qualified, they are aware of teaching/learning practice issues and sensitive to issues of autobiography and self-translation. Furthermore, IFL teachers use books (*Facile Facile. Libro di Italiano per studenti stranieri*. Level A1)<sup>13</sup> but mostly prepare their own lessons on the basis of daily routines and autobiographical events and they all report: 1) the use of ELF or another lingua franca or a pidgin/interlanguage in class (with differences in percentages of use that range from 50% to 10% of the lesson time); 2) the use of mitigation strategies in class; 3) positive feedback from the students when their native languages are considered in class.

As the data confirm, the research questions were answered positively and ELF can definitively be considered and experienced in terms of a translanguaging practice. Although there is still the tendency to avoid the use of ELF entirely when Italian proficiency grows, we observed that the creation of a multilingual environment produces positive effects on the students. Like Klimkiewicz, we believe that “self-translation, as multilingual exchange with the self, can illuminate the shaping of a multilingual subjectivity and fragmented identity against a more fixed and rooted monolingual self” (2013: 198). With the help of

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<sup>13</sup> *Facile Facile. Libro di Italiano per studenti stranieri*. Level A1. P. Cassiani, L. Mattioli, A. Parini, Nina Edizioni, Pesaro, 2008.

teachers' strategies, based on a profound awareness of the complex context in which they operate, students can incorporate their autobiographical experience into their learning practices and eventually become conscious translingual individuals.

#### 4. Shaping new pedagogical strategies and models: from foreigner talk to the mitigation approach

This section is a further attempt to answer the last research question, which is focused on the investigation of the implications for language teaching in contexts of language contact involving ELF, the host languages and the repertoires of the L1s spoken by immigrant learners. To this end, we will briefly return to the notion of foreigner talk, in order to propose a new paradigm, which we deem more appropriate for the investigation of teaching/learning practices in the migration context. At a first glance, the foreigner talk defined by Lipski (2005) is used by teachers in the very first stages of the teaching practice, and it concerns both Italian and English sentences, as in the expressions “Y, go to school tomorrow?” or “*Dire, Y, non ti preoccupare!*”. The tone of voice, the inflection and the grammar mistakes are among the most common characteristics of the way teachers talk in class. Unlike teacher’s talk, the language used by teachers in migration contexts may appear closer to the foreigner talk in various terms:

3. suprasegmental (exaggerated intonation, more gestures, high pitch or wide range, loudness, onomatopoeia, more pauses, slower tempo);
4. phonological (clear enunciation, phonological simplification);
5. semantic (more concrete lexicon, increased use of definition);
6. syntactic (simplified clausal structures, simplified phrasal structures e.g. fewer articles, fewer possessives, omitted pronouns (Hatch, 1983 in Boulima, 1999: 23-25)).

But what differentiates the IFL teacher’s talk from foreigner talk in our context is awareness: teachers consciously make mistakes in order to simplify the sentences and make communication work. Mistakes do not depend on a lack of proficiency and there is never the perception of a superior status on the part of the native speaker (Gallaway & Richards, 1994: 259). Indeed, the teachers interviewed agree on the necessity to use gestures and a slower tempo, clear enunciation and a concrete lexicon for the sake of communication, and they never consider their students unable to understand. They all share the awareness that simplified phrasal structures are fundamental and that, in some cases, conscious mistakes in order to assure understanding can be considered an option. As emphasised in the first section of this article, in theorising on the use of ELF, Hülmbauer emphasises the shift of focus from correctness towards

communicative effectiveness, which may also characterise the use of the foreigner talk (2013: 55), and the non-standard interlanguage talk used by students (Galloway & Richards, 1994: 259).

But in the context of multicultural classrooms, like those we observed in this study, where factors like integration, tolerance, respect and conflict are at issue every day, the use of ELF becomes more and more controversial. On the one hand, it provides teachers with the chance to avoid communication gaps or misunderstandings, and allows Anglophone students to express themselves when their knowledge of Italian is still too weak; on the other hand, as reported by some of the teachers, it may continue to engender a form of discrimination against those students who are illiterate or completely lacking in English competence.

In such a context, if English is used as a lingua franca, these classrooms also become an ideal setting for the study of intercultural pragmatics. In fact, the interlocutors share English as a common language but come from different sociocultural backgrounds where there are “preferred ways of saying things” (Kecskes, 2007: 192). In order to support these theoretical assumptions, we show two examples below of task-based activities carried out by ILF teachers in a multicultural class of migrants speaking ELF as a mediating language:

1. Lesson topic: how to read and write birthdates

a. Teacher: *X vieni a scrivere la tua data di nascita?*

Student: What?

Teacher: Your birthdate. Day, month and year. Ok?

Student: Oh yeah, *sì*. I'm sorry. *Capito*.

(Student writes 1980 on the whiteboard)

Teacher: *Leggi i numeri della data ora*.

Student: *Mille novecento ott...* I'm sorry, I...

Teacher: *Non preoccuparti*. No problem. *È difficile.. mille novecento ottanta*. (repeating slower) *Mille novecento ottanta*. Ripeti ora. Once more.

Student: *Mille novecento ottanta*.

Teacher: Very good! *Molto bene! Bravo!*

2. Lesson task: the teacher asks three students to read and understand a dialogue<sup>14</sup> on ‘*Che lavoro fai?*’ (What’s your job?)

a. Mustafa (Student 1): *Ciao Olga, ti presento mia moglie, si chiama Zobra*.

Olga (Student 2): *Piacere, Zobra, io sono Olga. Parli italiano?*

Zohra (Student 3): *Parlo poco*.

<sup>14</sup> Activity taken from *Facile Facile. Libro di Italiano per studenti stranieri*. Level A1. P. Cassiani, L. Mattioli, A. Parini, Nina Edizioni, Pesaro, 2008.

Olga: *Che lavoro fai?*

Mustafa: *Lei no lavora, è casalinga.*

(Teacher intervenes in the dialogue and says: *non lavora*; negation in Italian is *non*;

Student 1: The meaning of *casalinga*? I don't know the word.

Teacher: The woman who works in the house, housewife. Clear now?)

b. Zohra: *E tu lavori?*

Olga: *Si faccio la badante da tre giorni.*

(Student 2: I'm sorry, don't know the meaning of *badante*.)

Teacher: *Nessun problema. Badante* is the person who cares somebody, an older person usually. Clear now?

Student 2: Oh, yeah.)

c. Mustafa: *Ti piace questo lavoro?*

Olga: *Sì, mi piace ma è un po' faticoso. E tu Mustafa al ristorante cosa fai?*

(Student 2: Sorry, *faticoso* means?)

Teacher: Hard, difficult)

d. Mustafa: *Lavoro come lavapiatti, solo il fine settimana.*

Olga: *Ti piace il tuo lavoro?*

Mustafa: *Sì mi piace, però guadagno poco e non sono in regola.*

Olga: *Io sono in prova per una settimana; se tutto va bene, la signora mi mette in regola. Scusa che ore sono?*

Mustafa: *Sono le 17.45.*

Olga: *Oh! È tardi, ti saluto.*

Mustafa and Zohra: *Ciao Olga, ci vediamo presto.*

(Student 2: I'm sorry but I don't understand some words. I guess *sono in prova* means somebody is testing me, right? But *Non sono in regola* means?

Teacher: Yes, yes, somebody is testing you. You're right! *Bravo. Non sono in regola* means that you don't have a regular contract.

From a close reading and analysis of the two activities, in which both the teacher and the student intervene to clarify the correctness of some specific words, it emerges that mitigation is the most practised pedagogical strategy in the multicultural classroom under examination. Mitigation (or 'downgrading') is a cover term for a set of strategies, rooted in a meta-pragmatic awareness, by which people try to make their saying/doing more effective (Caffi, 1999: 882). The notion of mitigation, which emerged in pragmatics in the '80s (Fraser, 1980), readily lends itself to connecting different fields (e.g. pragmatics and classical rhetoric), different categories (e.g. illocution and perlocution), and different perspectives (e.g. sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic approaches to

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communication). Within the study of discourse, mitigation is broadly defined as a weakening or downgrading of interactional parameters, which affects the allocation and redistribution of rights and obligations (Caffi, 1999), as a way “to ease the anticipated unwelcome effect” (Fraser, 1999: 342) or as a “reduction of vulnerability” (Martinovski, 2000).

Mitigation is expressed in concrete linguistic patterns such as elliptic clauses, cut-off words, self-repetitions, pauses, lower and reassuring tone, gestures and modal expressions, etc., which seem to be independent of language, culture and legal system (Martinovski, 2000). For the purposes of this research, mitigation is conceived of as a cognitive but also a linguistic and a social phenomenon. The project carried out in the IFL classrooms adds more concrete reflections to the use of mitigation in specific educational settings in which teachers apparently adopt such pragma-linguistic strategies as a way to avoid demotivation through standard correction, given its face-threatening nature and its disruptive potential if performed in what students/interlocutors might perceive as the ‘wrong’ way of learning or expressing themselves in Italian. Adopted as a pedagogical strategy, mitigation may engender a new teaching and learning approach based on the complementary use of ELF and IFL, giving prominence to such mutual values as proximity, sharing, understanding and closeness.

In the present work, which takes its data from a larger corpus of transcripts of several interactions occurring between IFL teachers and migrant students who generally use ELF as their ‘anchor’ language, different kinds of mitigators and mitigation strategies are discussed along with the potential effects they entail with regard to the foreign language learning process. Among them, we shall mention some of the most remarkable examples which characterise the interactions shown above: token agreements (e.g. Teacher: clear now? Student: oh, yeah); use of hedges (e.g.: I guess, it seems); requests for clarification (e.g. What?; The meaning of..?, Clear now?); use of prefacing positive remarks towards the addressee (e.g. *molto bene!*, *bravo!*); suggestions (e.g. *ripeti ora*, once more); expression of regret (e.g. oh, yeah, *sì*. I’m sorry; *mille novecento ott...* I’m sorry, I.; I’m sorry, don’t know the meaning of *badante*; I’m sorry but I don’t understand some words.).

Of all these features, the expression of regret is one of the most frequent mitigating learning strategies used by students in the IFL-ELF interactions as an attempt to mitigate their difficulty by using the apologetic ‘I’m sorry.’ Quite remarkably, though the speakers here may have a high linguistic competence in English (as most of them demonstrated in class) it could be said that their pragmatic competence in ELF is slightly faulty. According to Kreutel (2007), expressions of regret are often overused by non-native speakers of English. This might be due to the fact that the acquisition of the expression ‘I’m sorry’ occurs at the earliest stages of L2 learning. As pointed out by Kreutel, the overuse of this strategy by non-native speakers might have unwelcome effects:

‘I’m sorry’ is said to be generally overused by non-native speakers because it

is acquired relatively early and used as a general means of avoiding confrontation by expressing humbleness and deference. Conversely, among native speakers, ‘I’m sorry’ is usually associated with apologies, that is, the speaker acknowledges a mistake or failure on his or her part [...]. This expression of reverence may be inappropriate when it comes to disagreement, indicating that a differing opinion is not necessarily a failure the speaker needs to apologize for (Kreutel, 2007: 331).

Furthermore, the mitigating repetition of ‘I’m sorry’ also matches the teacher’s friendly way to support the students’ insecurity with such relieving expressions as ‘no problem’ or ‘yes, yes, you’re right!’. What seems to occur is what Kreutel (2007: 338) calls “the sandwich pattern,” where mitigation is practised by both the teacher and the students, and might be related to a common desire to keep the area free of conflict since the participants know they are involved in a collaborative task.

As a result, from the excerpts illustrated we realise that corrections are formulated in a very soft way, and the confirmation of a statement is usually followed by the teacher’s mitigating and reassuring statement: “*Non preoccuparti*. No problem. *È difficile...mille novecento ottanta* (repeating slower). *Mille novecento ottanta. Ripeti ora*. Once more.” These are evident examples of mitigation strategies also known as repair and redressive actions, referring to the processes available to speakers through which they can deal with the problems which arise in their talk (Liddicoat 2007). Repair is a broader concept than simply the correction of errors in talk by replacing an incorrect form with a correct one, although such corrections are a part of repair. Drawing on the examples of the interactions mentioned above, the organisation of repair is based on different combinations (Sacks, Jefferson & Schegloff, 1977) as experienced by the teacher and the students in the classes observed:

- 1) self-initiated self-repair: the speaker of the repairable item both indicates a problem in the talk and resolves the problem (see the example from the activity 1a as shown above: “Teacher: *Non preoccuparti*. No problem. *È difficile.. mille novecento ottanta*. (repeating slower) *Mille novecento ottanta*. Ripeti ora. Once more”);
- 2) self-initiated other-repair: the speaker of the repairable item indicates a problem in the talk, but the recipient resolves the problem (see the example from the activity 1a as shown above: “Teacher: Your birthdate. Day, month and year. Ok? Student: Oh yeah, *sì*. I’m sorry. *Capito*.”; Student writes 1980 on the whiteboard);
- 3) other-initiated self-repair: the recipient of the repairable item indicates a problem in the talk and the speaker resolves the problem (see the example from the activity 2 b as shown above: “Student 2: I’m sorry, don’t know the meaning of *badante*. Teacher: *Nessun problema*. *Badante* is the person who cares somebody, an older person usually. Clear now? Student 2: Oh, yeah.)

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The analysis of the mitigation strategies used in the ILF-ELF interactions between teachers and students may help us to approach language contact as a social and pragmatic phenomenon by looking at how language contact manifests itself in a group of speakers. ELF interactions are situations in which the average speaker is multilingual and knows that the other speakers are also multilingual, although usually with different individual multilingual repertoires (IMRs). Whether explicitly commented on or not, ELF speakers are aware that their interactions take place in emergent transcultural and translanguaging spaces. The examples of language contacts between ELF and IFL discussed in this paper also illustrate how linguistic creativity manifests itself in ELF not only in the way the virtual language of ‘English’ (Widdowson 1997: 138–140) is flexibly and creatively adapted and used, but also in the way in which non-English speech can be also integrated into ELF discourse.

## 5. Conclusions

The language class can never be considered a neutral space since all the participants in such a specific communicative situation bring with them their cultural and linguistic history that influences the final goal, which is the acquisition or betterment of linguistic competence. Against this background, the aim of our investigation was to highlight how this dynamic works in the IFL classroom when ELF is used. The migration context in Southern Italy offers an extremely varied set of examples and experiences that we approached according to Byrd Clark & Dervin’s reflexivity theory, mentioned in Section 3. The theoretical shift of focus from the analysis of foreigner talk to the mitigation approach was, indeed, possible since we recognised and acknowledged “a need to become aware of the illusions of the social world as well as our own representations and engagements with them” (Byrd Clark & Dervin, 2014: 23).

Approaching students, who are at the same time beneficiaries of a service included in a larger humanitarian project, required the abandonment of ideas of linguistic correctness and perfection, as well as any form of cultural and linguistic prejudice. This attitude was fundamental in order to establish the best condition for learning/teaching/researching, that is, the absence of any form of positive or negative expectations. Creating a space for surprise, namely, giving the students the same chance to fail or succeed, to disappoint or reward the teachers, was necessary to establish such conditions. Teachers showed a high degree of awareness as far as their double role as instructors and educators was concerned, and we benefited from the actual observation of such a complex educational context where respect and emotions play a crucial role. It imbued the language theories in this research with a sense of reality.

In addition to problematising the general notion of ELF in multicultural classrooms, the research indicated that language contact phenomena can be

analysed and described from different theoretical perspectives and with an emphasis on various linguistic dimensions or parameters. Results show that students with a low linguistic proficiency in IFL follow the same strategies native speakers do in order to avoid face-threats (not only to their interlocutors' face but also to their own). Moreover, they display a wide range of native-like strategies such as requesting clarification or asking for explanations through the use of ELF. It follows from this that linguistic proficiency in ELF – at least in the case of the participants in the current experiment – clearly plays a vital role in the development of pragmatic competence.

Finally, in line with Canagarajah's translingual theory (2013), we maintain that individuals are not only capable of but also in need of adapting to new communicative practices in order to negotiate, mediate and adapt to the new changing paradigms of the contemporary world. The paradigm of superdiversity, mentioned in Section 2, helps us to consider that the emerging phenomena of translingual social contact generated by globalisation, mobility and migration is encouraging the proposal of new theoretical and practical concepts. The deterritorialised and transidiomatic 'supergroup' (Vertovec, 2007; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011) of IFL teachers and their migrant students represents the complex arena of new social and linguistic research debates, since it problematises the relationship between linguistic communities and nation-states, and between the systematic knowledge of languages and their relationships to other cultures.

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***Localising or globalising?  
Multilingualism and lingua franca in the management of  
emergencies from natural disasters<sup>1</sup>***

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*Abstract*

*Communities are ever more multilingual and multicultural thanks to the free movement of people all over the world and to constant migration flows, hence public communications about an evolving disaster need to account for the different languages spoken within the same community and across borders. Events such as Hurricane Katrina, the Haiti earthquake, the Central European floods in 2013, the heavy rain and snowfall of 2014 in northern Italy or the major flood that struck UK and Ireland in 2016 have shown that natural disasters know no national boundaries and often require collaboration between emergency organisations from different countries to help affected populations and bring disaster relief.*

*Our review of emergency management software systems indicates that they are either not localised at all because they mainly address an English-speaking audience – thus excluding a considerable number of potential users – or are localised into a great number of languages using machine translation, with some labels or sentences left in English.*

*In this article we describe the method we developed and the work we carried out for the (g)localisation of the graphic user interface of the disaster management system and documentation developed within our EU-FP7-funded project, Slándáil. Before a product can be localised, it needs to undergo a process of globalisation, which may be followed or substituted by localisability, both entailing linguistic and cultural evaluations such as the comparison of cultural systems and the translation issues brought about by potential differences. The potential costs incurred and resources needed to localise these systems and attendant documents are also assessed.*

*The present article contributes to account for and map the socio-linguistic variation present in the language of emergency management, as used by different stakeholders. (G)localisation is used to facilitate cross-linguistic communications among emergency operators and aid them in intercultural communication during emergencies.*

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<sup>1</sup> Maria Teresa Musacchio wrote Sections 1, 2 and 4 of this article, Raffaella Panizzon Sections 3 and 5.

## **1. Introduction**

In the era of globalisation, localisation is one of the fastest growing services in the language industry (Common Sense Advisory, 2015). It may seem paradoxical that while the world is going global, individual people ‘prefer local’, but translation – an estimated \$4 billion business in 2016, more than half of which in Europe – is currently growing at an annual rate of 5.5%, while localisation is the 4th fastest growing industry in the US (Henderson, 2016). It is not – or not just – that the tide of globalisation may be turning, but rather that localisation pertains to those products and services people use every day. If over 75% of the world population knows no English (Lyne, 2016), it hardly comes as a surprise that on average people prefer to interact with tools, platforms, or documentation in their own language.

Localisation has to do with language as much as with culture. When information needs to be transferred to places where different languages from the original are spoken, localisation becomes essential. In this way, linguistic specificity and cultural difference are maintained so that identity can be preserved (Cronin 2006: 29). Large multinational companies have soon learned that it is not just language, but culture that is important to connect with people at local level. By contrast, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) often seek to go global first, i.e. they try to market their product(s) or service(s) in a widely-spoken language – typically English – to make their brand known at international level before they consider localising into less widely-spoken languages. Emergency management organisations act in very similar fashion in an international context while they include ‘local’ languages in cross-border operations. It is debatable whether globalising into English is localising too, as English is the mother tongue of 6% of the world population and it would be very difficult not to include English native speakers amongst the prospective recipients. Moreover, in the profiling of recipients that is an essential part of the translator’s work, it is much easier to identify the cultural preferences of real people than imaginary ‘citizens of the world’.

Much research in software localisation focuses on ‘going local’, i.e. translating into languages and cultures different from those of the original system. Successful localisation relies on optimum usability, and on enabling users to interact with the translated text as if this had been directly produced in the target language and culture (Sin-wai, 2013: 359). Further research investigates problems of quality assurance (QA) mostly focussing on aspects pertaining to the acceptability of the translation of strings, and on tools and methods to achieve and assess it (Bowker, 2005; Schmitz, 2007; Colina 2008; Jiménez–Crespo, 2009a and 2009b; Karsch, 2009; and Dunne, 2009). As a result of this discussion, a

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number of good practices have been outlined (cf. Gala's "Standards and Guidelines for the Language Industry").<sup>2</sup>

In this article we analyse the special case of SMEs developing software within our EU project Slándáil (Security System for language and image analysis) for the management of emergencies from natural disasters both in English-speaking countries and in countries where no languages of wider diffusion such as English and Spanish are spoken. In the following sections, we describe the method we developed to first 'globalise' the software into English and then to localise it into German for emergency operators. In the process, we map the socio-linguistic variation we encountered and the strategies we used to achieve high quality in intercultural communications.

## 2. (G)localisation for emergency management: methods and resources

The localization of the Slándáil graphical user interface (GUI) – i.e. a user interface for interacting with electronic devices through graphical icons and visual indicators instead of through command lines – consisted of a number of steps. First, a survey of existing emergency management systems (EMS) and of their localised versions (if present) was carried out. Second, a corpus of texts relating to emergency management during natural disasters was compiled and used as a reference for translation and for (semi)automatic term extraction. Term candidates were evaluated by linguists and used to create a termbank. The GUI was then translated from Italian into English and German using the resources created. Finally, the project's emergency managers provided feedback on the usability and communicativeness of the GUI as native speakers of the target languages.

A survey conducted on twenty emergency management systems and on their localised versions highlighted that most of them are available only in one language, thus excluding a considerable number of other potential emergency operators who do not speak that language. In particular, 75% of the systems surveyed were not localised at all, 15% were localised into a number of languages using machine translation or crowdsourcing, and only 10% were professionally localised. Platforms considered include

1. NICS (Next-generation Incident Command System), a web-based command and control platform for the management of incident of all scales developed by MIT in partnership with the operators from the California First Responder Community;

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<sup>2</sup> Available at <http://lsrp.galacrisp.org/#why.html>, Gala's Standard and Guidelines have replaced LISA's after LISA closed in 2011.

2. IDSS (Intelligent Disaster Decision Support System), a platform for the smart integration of geospatial information with an advanced optimisation and simulation engine; and
3. Sahana Eden, an open source platform for disaster management with a highly configurable structure.

These platforms are not only for internal use by police forces such as the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and the Garda Síochána in the Republic of Ireland, or emergency management organisations such as Germany’s Bundesamt für Bevölkerungsschutz und Katastrophenshilfe (BBK) or Italy’s Protezione Civile. They often have a public interface offering information to the general public about ongoing disasters nation-wide – for example US NICS or Australia’s IDSS – or world-wide such as Sahana Eden. Sometimes they even request users to report on known emergencies (cf. Safe Trek and InciWeb). Most of these systems and the information they provide would not be accessible to all individuals living in multilingual and multicultural societies. Moreover, agencies now use different emergency management systems that cannot exchange information because they are not localised in all emergency operators’ native language and culture. This state of play inevitably prevents the smooth coordination of international or cross-border operations and may lead to an increase in damage and casualties (Aye et al. 2016, Lorenz and Dittmer 2016: 47-8).

To improve the exchange of information, to ensure smoother coordination of national and international operations and to communicate more effectively under the typical time constraints of emergencies, it is essential that messages, documents and management systems are available in the language(s) used in the area where disaster strikes. In particular, command and control platforms need to ‘speak’ the local language(s) and are examples of both software and web localisation in emergency management. Software localisation has been defined as (Schäler, 2009: 157):

the linguistic and cultural adaptation of digital content to the requirements and the *locale* of a foreign market; it includes the provision of services and technologies for the management of multilingualism across the digital global information flow.

Emergency management platforms are often web-based nowadays. Web localisation is “the translation of the software’s user interface or information on a web page into another language” (Sin-wai 2013: 347). Though what we discuss here is the localisation of a graphic user interface, which is usually categorised as software localisation (Sin-wai 2013: 349; Jiménez-Crespo 34, 63), aspects of web localisation also need to be taken into account, especially with reference to culture (Jiménez-Crespo and Singh 2016). Localisation is a type of highly *domesticated* translation and an instance of *culturalisation* (O’Hagan and Ashworth,

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2002: 66)<sup>3</sup> whereby the message as a whole – i.e. including both text and visual elements – is adapted to meet the cultural expectations of target audiences. Thus, consideration about the role and the impact of culture and of cultural filters (Katan, 2009: 75) is an integral part of the discussion on the localisation of software systems.

Emergency management software systems are culture-bound as different types of bodies are charged with them across countries. It can be a civilian body with limited decision-making power (as is the case with the Italian *Protezione Civile*), it can be police forces (as in the UK and Ireland), or it can be the military (as in Germany). The greater or lesser propensity for disaster preparedness during peace times and the perception of risk influences the organisation of rescue operations and the relationship to the population. From a communicative standpoint, emergencies can be regarded as social constructs whose meaning and extent are decided according to values, beliefs, expectations and norms that vary across cultures (Hofstede et al. 2010; Schwarz et al. 2016: 3). In localisation, then, these cultural differences are not only reflected in the textual components of software systems but also found in their visual structure and the way they display information. Information is then interpreted by users following a ‘cultural grammar’ (Katan, 2009: 86). Localisation is associated with a process of internationalisation of program design and document development (Pym 2014: 121). In order to be efficient and effective, it needs a focus on local relevance and cultural behaviour and for that reason it is now often associated with transcreation. This practice is frequently employed in marketing and advertising (but also websites and the like) and is said to go beyond translation in that it recasts the source text in a new language while preserving the intended content (Pedersen 2014; see also *Cultus* 2014).

Platforms such as the Eden developed by the Sahana Foundation are essentially databases which collect information about staff, facilities, physical assets, logistics, inventories and supplies to be deployed during emergencies. The Slándáil system is an emergency management software that can receive information from a number of sources – including the web and social media – i.e. not just data that is input by the staff in the organisation. On the basis of the information received, Slándáil manages disaster scenarios in real or simulated emergencies and thus assists operators in making better-informed, timely decisions in disaster preparedness, response, mitigation and recovery. Slándáil-like systems operate first at the level of the graphical user interface, the communicativeness of the system with its end user, i.e. a disaster manager; and second, the comunicativeness of the actionable information generated by the system and released to the general public using social computing systems.

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<sup>3</sup> Translation Studies are still debating the role of translation within the localisation process. For a summary, see Maumevičienė (2012).

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The Slándáil software system was first developed by one of the Italian project partners and hence was initially available only in Italian. The subsequent localisation into the other project languages had a twofold goal: to make the EMS accessible to English- and German-speaking project partners, and to provide all future emergency operators with knowledge of English with a globalised EMS (internationalisation). The localisation work was carried out by translation specialists who were native speakers of Italian, and was thus an instance of inverse translation. While this is a commonly accepted practice in the professional world, it has been acknowledged and investigated by translation scholars only in recent times as evidence accrued that the quality, accuracy, acceptability and fluency of translations by non-native speakers is not necessarily linguistically or indeed culturally deficient (Pokorn 2005; Rodríguez and Schnell, 2012: 69). The necessary extralinguistic knowledge, i.e. domain-specific and bicultural knowledge, was acquired through the compilation and study of comparable corpora on emergency management and subsequent terminology development (see section 2.1), along with specific investigation of the communicative practices of partner emergency management agencies. Feedback from project partners who are experts in emergency management contributed to the validation of the localisation work. Advertising-like transcreation was involved whenever components needed to be maximally effective but their culture-bound features required adaptation to reflect local specificities (Pedersen 2014: 67) in the practice of emergency management. In German and Italian, for example, natural disasters are conceptualised from the point of view of the risk they pose, while in English they are described as events. The Italian Protezione Civile often refers to the *rischio sismico* (seismic risk) where FEMA, PSNI and Garda Síochána simply talk of earthquakes. Further, transediting strategies (Ulrych 2009) were employed as recipient-oriented rewriting techniques that took into account cultural differences. The need for adjustment may arise for example from the different nature of emergency organisations. PSNI and Garda Síochána operate differently in some respects because they are part of police forces, while Italian Protezione Civile is an independent body. Accordingly, we attempted to meet the emergency operators' expectations by restructuring messages through the addition, deletion, substitution or rearrangement of information.

The localisation of the Slándáil GUI was based on two key resources: corpora and terminology. Comparable corpora relating to emergency management from formal and social media in the three project languages were automatically and semi-automatically collected.<sup>4</sup> All types of communication

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<sup>4</sup> The Slándáil corpus includes documents retrieved using LexisNexis, Facebook posts and Twitter messages, the FEMA Major Disaster Declaration Corpus, the Slándáil Newsletter corpus, UNIPD corpus (manuals, protocols, reports, bulletins, glossaries), and International Red Cross, UNISDR, EIONET documents.

(technical reports, alerts and notices for the population at large, social media messages, etc.) were included in the corpus in order to account for the differences found in the use of language within differentiated groups, namely the police (traffic police, beat officers, civic co-ordination, law and order maintenance, intelligence), medical services (primary and tertiary services) and the population (levels of education, health and epidemiological profiles). Comparable corpora are key resources for localisation in that they support translators in finding reliable evidence of authentic lexically, syntactically and stylistically equivalents in the target language (Jiménez-Crespo, 2009a, and 2009b; Wilkinson, 2005). By relying on corpus evidence, translators can produce a text better suited to the expectations of users in terms of pragmatic, register, phraseology, and genre adequacy. In this sense, corpora also assist in achieving satisfying functional equivalence and better intercultural understanding. Since usability is one of the key requirements of localisation, the use of corpora increases the quality of the final product, and reduces costs by increasing translator's productivity. Translation based on corpora was used to create a translation memory to use for localisation of future EMSs and for updates to the Slándáil system documentation. Throughout the project, they were also used to develop the Slándáil lexicon, a terminology wiki.

The guiding criteria for corpus collection are (Ahmad, 2008: 64):

1. representativeness (different types of communication produced by a variety of users were accounted for e.g. fact sheets, official documents, social media posts);
2. balance (both formal and social media were included);
3. reliability (the sources selected are taken from authoritative formal and social media<sup>5</sup>);
4. timeliness (only recent texts were selected).

5.

For the localisation of the GUI only informative texts were used, that is texts produced by experts of various disciplines concerned with providing objective information, as opposed to imaginative texts, which include works of fictions and which have to do with personal opinions and feelings. Informative texts such as bulletins and reports – e.g. Germany's magazine *Bevölkerungsschutz*, US FEMA's *Bulletin* or Italy's *La Protezione Civile italiana* – were used to retrieve and investigate instances of the language used by emergency managers to ensure better consistency and cultural-pragmatic accuracy.

Corpora also included expert-to-expert communication such as guidelines and protocols on public communication practices published by emergency

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<sup>5</sup> The social media were essentially Facebook posts and Twitter messages that were either accounts of national emergency management organisations or accounts the organisations redirected users to.

management agencies such as the UK's Cabinet Office *Communicating with the Public*, the German Ministry of the Interior's *Leitfaden Krisenkommunikation* or *Disaster Communications in a Changing Media World* (Haddow and Haddow 2014). The analysis of these documents provided examples of communication whether successful – e.g. during hurricane Sandy – or unsuccessful – e.g. during hurricane Katrina. Successful crisis communication relies heavily on terminologically clear, coherent, concise, syntactically simple messages able to inform, reassure, and appeal to the public. These guidelines were used for structuring and evaluating messages during the localisation process.

After lexical, syntactic and semantic analysis of the texts was carried out, automatic terminology extraction and subsequent evaluation from terminologists and field experts allowed us to create a termbank. The terms were used to translate approximately 20% of the messages present in the interface. Terminology is the primary means of communication and knowledge transfer between software developers and emergency operators. Effective terminology management is critical to the development and use of software products. Well-designed and consistent terminology and a clear language also have an impact on software usability and comprehensibility help emergency operators to organise and spread vital information swiftly (Schmitz, 2007: 49-52).

The development and study of terminology was key to our localisation work because term use too is culturally determined, and semantic and conceptual equivalence may not be the only viable parameters when selecting target language terms. Contextual equivalence was hence preferred as it allowed us to take into account users' preferences in the selection of terms in specific contexts, thus reflecting their stance towards reality and towards what they deem appropriate in a given context. Localisers generally resort to translation memories (TMs) in order to increase productivity and accuracy. In the case of our project, there was no TM available as emergency management practices vary considerably from country to country and emergency management systems are mainly developed in the manufacturing company's national language. Thus, contents require a degree of adaptation, transcreation and/or transediting. As outlined above, however, now that the Slándáil system has been 'globalised' into English and localised into German, a TM and guidelines exist for future reference.

### 3. Analysis

Emergency management systems such as NICS, IDSS and Slándáil are designed to be used by emergency operators, who are tasked with receiving emergency communications and enter relevant data to manage crises in the ongoing scenario – or in a simulated one for training purposes. The system then triggers alerts to authorities and keeps a permanent record of operations, resources, locations, etc.

Thus, the messages displayed by the system need to be immediately interpretable by users by adapting language to their cultural and pragmatic expectations and by removing any foreign element.

In localisation, culturally-laden elements are identified by the notion of ‘locale’, which are not just language-specific conventions such as date and time format, keyboard type, numbers, currencies, orthography, or units of measurement as these can be easily handled by CAT tools to avoid human mistakes, but more importantly a specific ‘gaze’ on reality and on every-day life situations. The latter necessarily requires careful adaptation or transcreation, as it cannot be assumed that meaning at this level is shared between cultures, and users are likely to respond to messages in different ways, or not to respond at all. Our localisation work focused on the attempt to analyse the specific gaze adopted within the system and on performing linguistic and cultural adaptation, transcreation and/or transediting. Here we shall focus on three main issues: interaction between text and visuals in the GUI, lack of contextual information in the translation of strings, and differences in conceptualisation.

Messages are not only conveyed through text but also through icons. These represent a schematised symbol or picture that induces or suppresses a particular action (Risku and Pircher, 2008: 161). The use of icons proves particularly important in software localisation as it minimises the text necessary to select a given object and the amount of dialogue between users and the system, thus reducing localisation time and costs. However, icons are not necessarily recognisable or unambiguous in absolute terms. If they represent *realia*, they will prove clear only if the target audience recognises them as such and associate them with the intended concept; if internationally known icons are used, they will prove clear only as long as they trigger the intended reaction. In other words, icons do not always travel well across cultures.

An example is provided in Figure 1 where two ‘tiles’, i.e. buttons that lead to a new tab, are shown. The tile *Anagrafiche* (lit. records) (left) leads to a registry of all people or institutions that can be contacted in case of emergency including authorities, schools, and companies. The tile *Tabellari* (data in table form) (right) leads to an ontology of the system, where lists of all items used to classify objects/events are presented (e.g. all types of incidents such as floods or earthquakes, of resources for emergency management, or of geographical information).

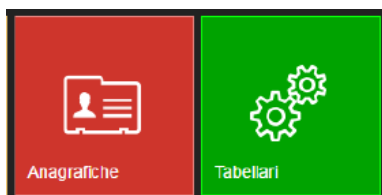


Figure 1.: Examples of tiles of the Slándáil GUI.

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The localisation of tiles aimed to combine the iconic information with the textual information and to convey the function of the tile at the same time. Thus, tiles were adapted as *rubric* and *lookup data* in English, and as *Personaldaten* and *Menüs* in German. While the Italian captions resulted somewhat opaque (especially *Tabellari*, despite the associated gear symbol), the localised versions have been translated based on actual use in each partner country.

Localisation files display each string of text as a separate unit of meaning deprived of any contextual information. Also, the order in which strings appear does not follow the sequence in which they are displayed in the GUI. They thus lack a narrative thread and “cannot be ‘read’ in the same way as traditional documents” (Dunne, 2015: 561). Below is an example showing a sequence of strings from the GUI in Italian and English respectively:

```
msg.save.success=Dati salvati con successo.  
msg.delete.success=Dati cancellati con successo.  
msg.confirm.modal.form.exit=Confermi l'uscita senza salvare?  
msg.select.items=Scegli oggetto(i)  
msg.create.tile=Crea l'aspetto della tile  
msg.create.filter=Crea filtro  
msg.term.service=Ho letto ed accettato le condizioni d'uso  
  
msg.save.success=The data have been successfully saved.  
msg.delete.success=The data have been successfully deleted.  
msg.confirm.modal.form.exit=Do you confirm exit without saving?  
msg.select.items=Choose item(s)  
msg.create.tile=Create tile  
msg.create.filter=Create filter  
msg.term.service=I have read and agreed to the terms and conditions
```

The interpretation issues deriving from lack of context were addressed by identifying the location of the text within the interface in order to retrieve its textual and iconic co-text and by analysing how the content of the string interacted with it. It should be noted that the localisation of the GUI did not entail a large number of words, as may be the case of more complex systems. Ambiguity was sometimes found at term level – especially when the information could not be found in the corpus –, in which case field experts were consulted to ensure maximum user-friendliness.

Conceptual differences between languages were also found. This is exemplified in the differences found in the types of disasters considered relevant in the four project countries. The UK and Ireland mainly focus on floods and storms; Germany on floods and power outages. In Italy the major natural hazards are floods and earthquakes. Differences can also be found in the

categorisations and labelling of emergency management phases (Temmerman 2000: 43 and 52) that can be traced back to different culture-specific practices in emergency management. In English speaking countries, emergency management is a process comprising four stages – *preparedness, mitigation, response, recovery* – while in German and in Italian they are *Vorsorge* (*prevention*), *Vorbereitung* (*preparedness*), *Bewältigung* (*response*), *Nachbereitung* (*recovery*) and *previsione* (*forecast*), *prevenzione* (*prevention*), *soccorso* (*response*), and *superamento dell'emergenza* (*recovery*) respectively. Though the phases are four in all three cases, the English term *preparedness* – unlike its German and Italian counterparts (*Vorsorge* or *previsione*) – does not foreground the forecasting of natural hazards while *mitigation*<sup>6</sup> has no direct equivalent as it partly overlaps with German *Vorbereitung*, *Bewältigung* and *Nachbereitung* and the Italian *prevenzione*, *soccorso* and *superamento dell'emergenza*. Further conceptualisation differences were found at a typological level, specifically between Romance languages on the one hand and Germanic languages on the other. Comparative grammar suggests that Italian conceptualises and hence describes reality through abstract concepts. By contrast, English often refers to phenomena by appealing to their concrete features. An example is the Italian version of our EMS, which uses *idraulico* as a short form of *rischio idraulico* to indicate all water-related disasters, while English-speaking emergency operators consistently refer to these events as *flooding* and German-speaking operators are in-between as they use *Hochwasserrisiken*, combining flooding (*Hochwasser*) with risks (*Risiken*). In this case our transcreation had to proceed accordingly by referring to risk in German and Italian and to the actual event in English.

The strings to be translated have been classified into four main types: (1) error messages, (2) operational messages (save, delete, close), (3) ontological messages (i.e. relating to types of incidents, incident statuses, or types of disasters), and (4) descriptive messages (e.g. ‘the following people were notified of the operation’). The constraints mentioned above (lack of contextual information and conceptual issues) were particularly evident in message types (1), (2) and (4). The translation of such strings was approached by prioritising terminological accuracy and pragmatics by means of transediting. For example the Italian pop-up message:

*Assicurarsi di aver avvertito le seguenti persone, ed aggiungere altre persone avvertite.*

(Make sure the following people have been notified, and add other people who have been notified.)

was localised into English as:

*Please notify the following people. Add any people you notify.*

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<sup>6</sup> Mitigation is defined as “the effort to reduce loss of life and property by lessening the impact of disasters. In order for mitigation to be effective we need to take action now—before the next disaster—to reduce human and financial consequences later (analysing risk, reducing risk, and insuring against risk)” (FEMA, “What is mitigation?”, <https://www.fema.gov/what-mitigation>).

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This is a case of instruction with option, or a non-binding instruction. It is transedited using the different politeness strategies required for the message to work in English. Pragmatic adequacy is thus achieved by means of an indirect request through ‘please’ followed by an imperative. The distribution of information has been preserved; however, the syntax of the original sentence was rearranged by creating two separate sentences, each containing one piece of information (‘notify a list of people’, and ‘add other people you notify’). By opting for a paratactic construction in English, the message increased its clarity and readability.

#### 4. Results and discussion

Analysis indicates that communication (the ‘newsroom’) is an integral part of emergency management; it is central to successfully handling an emergency. It has changed considerably with the advent of social media and communication strategies need to be adapted accordingly. When the population at large is addressed it is meant to create bonding in ‘peace times’, i.e. to establish people’s confidence in emergency operators and their work which during emergencies will turn into trust – for example trusting emergency operators that an area must be evacuated leaving property behind. As a consequence, careless drafting of messages or oral communications can adversely affect the outcome of emergency management and negatively impact the image of the emergency agency for a very long time. Review of the corpus confirms that the underlying principle of all communications and the yardstick by which their quality is measured is to what extent they can contribute to build a trust relationship between the emergency operators and the population.

The localisation process enabled all project partners and emergency operators to fully access and test the platform in their language. The new versions of the system also grant accessibility beyond the limits of the project. Thus, the ‘local’ German version is accessible to all German-speaking countries – i.e. to around 90 million people –, thus reaching almost one fifth of the EU population. The localisation into English makes the GUI available not only to English-speaking countries but also to all those users with a knowledge of English. This can be regarded as an act of glocalisation: English here does not simply qualify as a ‘locale’ but rather as a *lingua franca*, which grants access to a global audience through an international language. The GUI can thus be accessed by a much broader community within and without the EU. The wider circulation of the system, then, makes it possible for agencies to trial it and then further adapt it to more specific locales, e.g. Australian English.

In any communication, addressees need to perform ‘contexting’, i.e. to negotiate how much meaning can be retrieved from the context and how much

of it is shared (or not). Hence, meaning can only be preserved when a context familiar to the target culture is given (Katan, 2009). In the specific case of software/web localisation, we are faced with an extreme example of target-oriented translation involving adaptation, transcreation and transediting, where out-of-context strings provide users with either informational or procedural content. It was thus of paramount importance for messages to be immediately understandable and culturally and pragmatically adequate.

The compilation of term entries led to a number of advantages in the localisation of the GUI. Equivalent domain terms had to be extracted and studied in context using corpus-based methods. Terminological investigations helped to shed light on categorical and conceptual differences and similarities between terms, thus expediting the translation stage and improving the usability and communicativeness of the GUI. Having a pre-established terminology ensured consistency in the translation of strings and contributed to better quality.

Section 2 highlighted that most EMSs currently available are either not localised at all or provide users with versions that are not produced by professional translators. These choices are mainly justified by economic reasons, considering that localisation may be relatively expensive. The methodology applied to localise the Slándáil GUI proved satisfactory in terms of cost effectiveness. The monetary value of the localisation work was estimated by consulting industry-standard platforms and was then compared with estimates from four language service providers. By managing the entire localisation process internally, the project achieved high standards in usability and communicativeness – as confirmed by emergency operators and external evaluators – at market competitive costs.

The acceptability of our adaptations, transcreations and transediting also originated from the pragmatic revision carried out by emergency operators native speakers of English and German. Their involvement improved the final version as we could tap their linguistic experience in using the technical language of emergency management and their competence in operational concerns that hinder communication during emergency management. While in the professional practice functional testing is generally carried out internally solely by linguists and engineers, the direct contribution of emergency operators during system development and localisation granted the full usability, communicativeness, and market-readiness of the system. The final localised system was tested for usability by end-user partners in the Slándáil project and further demonstrated to members of the Business Continuity Institute and the Emergency Planning Society. Overall the GUI has been rated as high-quality.

## **5. Conclusion**

Software localisation is an example of an ever more globalised translation market,

where users demand products to be displayed in their native language. In order to achieve this, a number of linguistic and cultural adaptations are required. The present paper discussed methods, tools, and issues in the localisation of the GUI of an emergency management system (EMS) for the EU project Slándáil by means of inverse translation from Italian into German and English. The resulting localised versions not only allowed all project emergency operators to access the GUI in their native language but also to create a glocalised system by using English as a *lingua franca*, thus granting access to a potentially global audience. The methodology applied also proved cost-effective since the localisation was performed internally.

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**Contact Languages Counteracting  
Language Planning Policies:  
A New Lingua Franca in the Oromia Region (Ethiopia)**

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*Abstract*

*In the current situation of civil and ethnic conflict in Ethiopia, language planning policies are a crucial issue. This article provides an account of an unprecedented phenomenon that impacts the linguistic scenario of Ethiopia and counteracts linguistic policies and trends: the use of Jamaican speech-forms (JSF) as lingua franca within different ethnic groups in the country. The article expands on previous research conducted by the author in the specific region of Oromia. The analysis covers dramatic years of conflicts and uprising in the area, where an international community of Rastafarians have introduced JSF and influenced cross-cultural behaviors, language, and identity. The survey addresses the process of language acquisition and choice of JSF and its decisive role in the identity formation of young adults in Ethiopia. The selected data, from transcriptions and video-recording, cover a span of six years, and show how the minority community, using JSF as vehicular language, has impacted on hegemonic multilingual and multicultural communities (not only Oromo, but also Amhara and Tigrayan). The study also has a claim to an innovative perspective on the dynamics of linguistic contact and the predominant role of prestige formation in linguistic choice dynamics, but also in cultural approaches and social behaviors. The specificity of the linguistic context features a highly organized hierarchical situation of translanguaging. The selected corpus instantiates examples of adjusting techniques and accommodation in conversations that empower 'youth speech'. JSF, used as lingua franca, represent an unpredictable phenomenon seemingly counteracting central regional hegemonies through linguistic practices, exo-normative behaviors and trans-cultural affiliations (religious, social, educational) that are also 'centrifugal' from major varieties of world English (VEAW).*

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## 1. Introduction. Political Background

In October 2016, the government of Ethiopia declared a state of emergency in response to an internal situation of violence and widespread protests. The unrest began in the regional state of Oromia, in the south of the country, over issues of land rights, but it suddenly turned into a claim for political, social and economic rights (BBC, Aljazeera, 09.10.2016). The Oromo are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, constituting almost 35% of the country's population, while the ruling coalition, in power for over 20 years, is mainly controlled by the Tigrayan ethnic group, which represents 6% of the country's population (Central Statistical Agency, 2008). The circumstances have tremendously impacted the stability and the security of the country, which has always been the most politically stable in the area of the Horn of Africa. While the government accuses foreign-based political forces and local groups of rebels of starting and instigating the violence, the Oromo dissidents denounce the use of heavy measures undertaken by the government to repress the protest, such as arbitrary arrests, political and diplomatic restrictions, curfews, and social media blocks (Aljazeera 02.10.2016).

Although economic and socio-political issues related to these events have been widely investigated and exposed through the international media, little attention has been paid to the linguistic implications.<sup>1</sup> By observing the dynamics of the conflict, it can be concluded that it has also been ignited by underlying linguistic policies and disputes.

## 2. The linguistic arena: language planning policies

To claim political rights implies the use of language as a means of political expression. Only a year before the recent Oromo unrest, legal controversies, also based on linguistic rights, started a state of social and political instability. A case in point is the 'land grabbing' in Shashemane, in the Oromo region: the local population decided to take back their lands now owned by foreigners, or Ethiopians of different ethnic groups, confiscating their houses, properties and companies. This involved also many Rastafarian repatriates. Some of these cases were taken to court or submitted to the local authority of the Shemghelennà, a council of elders, issuing binding decisions on behalf of the local legal institutions. In both cases, the foreign claimants accused Oromo defendants in front of Oromo judges, concomitant with a debate between Oromo lawyers. Furthermore, according to the legislation of Oromia, Afaan Oromo is the

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<sup>1</sup> News reporting and the choice of language is also crucial: online reporting at the very outburst of violence was available on the web through the mediation of English, in turn mediated through reporting in Amharic from institutional sources, representing only a partial and incomplete perspective, if not a manipulated one.

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language used for written documentation and spoken communication between the representatives of the parties and the legal institutions. In such a biased situation, it is to be noted that there was little chance of winning the case and it resulted indeed in the forced option of the foreign owners leaving their houses and their properties.

In this instance, the issue of legal communication and the use of a shared judicial procedure and common jurisdiction in a common language is dramatically relevant. Linguistic interpretation of land rights and its formulation in 'plain' language is a focal point in the international debate regarding property rights and acquisitional claims, in particular for what concerns the implementation of constitutional property law at regional level.

In terms of linguistic rights, within the discourse of multilingualism, the 1994 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia maintained and recognized Amharic as the one and only official working language, but promoted equal treatment of all the languages of the country.<sup>2</sup> Article 5 of the Constitution reads: 'All Ethiopian languages shall enjoy equal state recognition', and that 'Amharic shall be the working language of the Federal Government' (Federal Negarit Gazeta, 1995).

The Amharic language is the medium of educational instruction, institutional affairs and conventional communication all over Ethiopia, since the reign of Emperor Tewdoros IV in 1855. (Ullendorf, 1973; Bender, Cooper and Ferguson, 1972; Pankhurst, 1966). Menelik II extended the use of the Amharic language beyond the frame of national unity, to the people of the newly conquered areas, and Haile Selassie I granted Amharic the status of 'official language of the Empire' in the 1955 Constitution (art.125).

The implementation of Amharic as the common language of Ethiopia can be analysed under two different perspectives: the preservation of national and political unity, and the imposition of the official lingua franca upon the conquered populations, such as in the Oromo-speaking areas of southern Ethiopia, focus of the present article (Darwah, 1975; Donham and James, 1980).

Starting from 1550, for nearly two centuries, Ethiopia faced migratory waves and attacks on the nomadic population of Oromo (horse-mounted warriors), penetrating from the southern bordering lands of Kenya. This community of warriors introduced their language in the area: Afaan-Oromo (also known as Oromifa, Oromic or Orominya). The language is also spoken in some northern areas of Kenya, but there are authors who place the origins of Afaan Oromo in an Ethiopian area called 'Meda Welabu' (Hassan, 1990; Baxter, Hultin and Triulzi, 1996).

Today, Afaan Oromo is the official language of Oromia, one of the eleven regional states of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia and, according to the last

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<sup>2</sup> The people of Ethiopia are ethnically and linguistically one of the most diverse in the world, and besides Amharic there are over 80 languages currently spoken (Negash 1990).

official census (2007), the most widely spoken regional language, with almost 25 million speakers, followed by Amharic and Somali:

FIRST LANGUAGE	SPEAKERS	%
Afaan-Oromo	24,929,268	33,80
Amharic	21,631,370	29,33
Somali	4,609,274	6,25

**Table 1: First Languages of Ethiopia (Census 2007).**

Although stemming from the common Afro-Asiatic group, Afaan Oromo is a Cushitic language and differs from Amharic which is Ethio-Semitic. It differs from Amharic also in its written form, since a scripted adaptation of Latin, called Qubee, has been adopted since 1991, after different scripts had been used to give Afaan-Oromo a written form.

In a study on language and youth ethnicity, Roger Hewitt observed how the same notions of ‘youth’ and ‘ethnicity’ attract ‘identity’, in terms of belonging (internal, related to the self), external membership, and group affiliation, which he termed ‘social registration’ (Hewitt, 1992). The model seems to be replicated, although historically differentiated and localized, with the current state of identity and youth language in Ethiopia, where fierce inter-ethnic struggles and violent opposition have been unleashed in the last decade, and language and linguistic policies have been used to reinforce identity and ethnicity.

The example set by the recent Oromo civil and political protest has already been followed by further unrests in other areas of the country, as in the case of the Gondar protests. During the protests, Oromo and Amhara nationalists have displayed signs of inter-group solidarity in the face of what they believe to be a common enemy, the ruling party TPLF (Aljazeera, 11.01.2017).

Similarly, fostered by the spirit of ethnic nationalism, linguistic policies aimed at the exclusive promotion of regional languages, as in the case of Oromia, could be enforced also by other regional states of Ethiopia. A direct consequence of this could be a rejection of the idea and the practice of Amharic as lingua franca at a federal level.

A further critical issue is the role played by the English language in this scenario. English has been taught in Ethiopia since the establishment of the first educational institutions (Tekeste, 1990). Since that time, it has consistently spread, especially during the last decades. The English language is being used throughout the country in the media, the press, and digital communication i.e. websites, blogs, etc. (Ambatechew, 1995; Eshetie, 2000).

English in Ethiopia has a particular status and is not perceived as the language of ‘colonizers’ and imperial subjection to Western hegemony. Its status has, on the contrary, been that of ‘liberation’, underlying intellectual resistance and social emancipation, counteracting the Italian Fascist invasion and the military

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occupation of Ethiopia (e.g. the activity of Sylvia Pankhurst, and the movement for Abyssinia). Ethiopia is the one nation in the Horn of Africa (and most probably in the world), where the colonial agenda was not enacted as a tool of hegemonic subjection with the subsequent destruction of its composite multi-cultural identity through colonization and assimilative policies. This may be partly accounted for also by the fact that Ethiopia was already an empire in modern times, with a prominent role in the League of Nations.

Previous research conducted by the author in Ethiopia focuses on the specific area of Shashamane, in the heart of Oromia regional state. This rural town in the south of the country (250 Km. from Addis Ababa) features the presence of a large number of ‘foreigners’ that have chosen it as their home, answering the call of the Emperor Haile Selassie I. In 1948, the Emperor donated 500 acres of His personal possessions to the members of the African Diaspora scattered around the world and to those who voluntarily decided to support Ethiopia in its fight for the liberation from fascism during the Italo-Ethiopian War (1935-1941). Starting from the 1950s, Shashamane has become one of the main destinations for Black people of the Diaspora, among most notably but not exclusively, the Rastafarian community, wishing to repatriate back to Africa - this phenomenon has been called the Repatriation movement.<sup>3</sup> Even though the first settlers came from the Caribbean, today there are members of the community repatriating from all over the world, making Shashamane the most multicultural area of the country.

Clearly, being Jamaican Speech Forms (JSF)<sup>4</sup> used as lingua franca and shared by both Jamaicans and non-Jamaicans of this community (Tomei 2005), the first encounter Ethiopians had with JSF was due to the contact with the members of the Rastafarian/Repatriation movement.

Another important element to be considered is the influence of music, more specifically Reggae and Dancehall. These are the most popular genres of music in Jamaica, different in many aspects but both using JSF as vehicular language. Reggae/Dancehall DJ talk is a domain of specialized technical discourse hybridized by lexico-syntactic items borrowed from JSF (Blommaert 2010). DJ talk is aired and broadcast, and occurs simultaneously in the rituals of interaction and/or web-connection with audience-listeners’ response (Cooper, 2004; Alleyne, 2012).

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<sup>3</sup> *Rastafari* is a faith developed in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, based on the divinity of Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia, crowned in Addis Ababa in 1930. According to the Rastafarian philosophy, Ethiopia represents the New Jerusalem, and one of the main practical aims of the movement is the Repatriation to Shashamane, place elected by the Emperor for the return of ‘his children’. For a more detailed description of the features and the theological aspects of the Rastafari faith see Bonacci 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Jamaican Speech Forms (JSF) is used as an umbrella-term, including the different varieties of language in use in Jamaica: from the recognized Jamaican Standard English to the Patwa and the more specific Rasta and Reggae/Dancehall varieties.

### 3. Methodology and Research design

It is beyond the scope of this article to investigate and to describe the reasons for the spread of JSF within the various Ethiopian ethnic groups. Rather, the focus here is on the use of language and its socio-political implications, in particular when compared with multilingualism and linguistic policies enforcing nationalism and ‘preservation’ of local identities.

The present research expands a previous study on the acquisition and use of JSF in the community of Shashamane, the result of over six years’ worth of investigation conducted in both Jamaica and Africa. In his ‘JSF in Ethiopia: The Emergence of a New Linguistic Scenario in Shashamane’, I showed how the local linguistic scenario is undergoing a process of change under the influence of JSF by Ethiopians. Indeed, a new variety of language is emerging due to the contact between JSF and the local languages: the Jamarigna or Jamharic (Jamaican + Amharic, locally called Amarigna) (Tomei 2005).

While in the previous study I investigated the phenomenon of the spread of JSF in a rural context, this research extends the area of enquiry to other regional states of Ethiopia (Tigray, SNNPR), and to the capital Addis Ababa. Here, due to the extremely fast development, linguistic hybridity and creativity are defining new frontiers of study.

In line with most recent trends of ‘metroinguistics’ (Smakman and Heinrich 2015; 2017), ‘translanguaging’ (García and Wei 2014)<sup>5</sup>, and sociolinguistic globalization (Blommaert 2010), the present research focuses on how language choice and identity are changing the dynamics of day-to-day rituals and linguistic practices, influenced by imitative prestige models and patterns of behavioural norms and beliefs. These modern concepts and theories highlight the role of speaker’s agency and consciousness, as well as creativity, more than the less recent code-switching and mixing paradigm the author has used in his previous research.<sup>6</sup>

This article features recent data, recordings, and transcriptions on the use of JSF by three subjects selected purposively with different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, and based in three different settings:

1. Shashamane, West Arsi Zone, Oromia Region – (estimated population: 130.000)

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<sup>5</sup> The term *Translanguaging* comes from the Welsh *transieithu*, and it was coined by C.Williams (1994-1996). The concept of translanguaging, which has been addressed and defined by several scholars, refers to complex linguistic practices in plurilingual contexts. More recent studies focus on its dynamics and features in our highly technological globalized world (García and Wei 2014).

<sup>6</sup> See also the recent development of AYUL (African Urban Youth Languages), an emerging field of study challenging the traditional approach to the varieties of World English (Ebongue and Hurst 2017, Nassenstein and Hollington 2015).

The official language in Shashamane is Afaan Oromo, but several ethnic groups (with their respective languages) are settled in the area. The presence of JSF, mainly due to the settlement of the Rastafarian/Repatriated community, is detectable in a variety of settings and domains, from the school, where the process of acquisition begins, to the streets, the ideal space for spontaneous talk and interactions.

2. Hawassa, capital of the SNNPR, Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (estimated population: 250.000)

In Hawassa, the first language is Sidamo, an Afro-Asiatic language spoken in several areas of southern Ethiopia. Hawassa is an extremely multicultural city: it is the regional capital, home to one of the largest Universities in the country (Hawassa University), and major tourist and business destination. The presence of JSF is consequently due to national and international mobility of students, business people, tourists, and Rastafarians.

3. Addis Ababa, capital of Ethiopia (estimated population: over 5 million)

Here, all Ethiopian ethnic groups and languages are represented. In addition, there is the largest number of international organizations, institutions, embassies and offices in Africa, with many employers permanently based in Addis Ababa. Consequently, the linguistic scenario is extremely complex, featuring the coexistence of a multiplicity of languages, contact languages and dialects. However, Amharic is the official language of institutions, education, and communication.

In Addis Ababa, the exposure to JSF is mainly related to two factors: the presence of numerous Jamaicans/Rastafarians (permanent members of the repatriated community or temporary visitors), and the popularity of Reggae/Dancehall music, promoted through radio, television, and live performances and events organized in the many music clubs of the capital.

The main source for the generation of data is represented by direct observation and recording of language choice and use, with a particular focus on the presence of JSF in juvenile slangs.

The heterogeneity of the settings identified for the investigation of the linguistic phenomenon clearly requires a methodological flexibility in data gathering, which will result in a combination of different methods, techniques, and integrated textual typologies:

- a. Interviews and focus group: structured/semi/non-structured, multiple sampling, dialogue, monologue, storytelling and accounts;
- b. Video-recording, digital recording: use of descriptive notes for para-linguistic and extra-linguistic elements;
- c. Questionnaires and tests: combined techniques, multiple-choice, etc;
- d. Note-taking and journals: tagging and labelling where needed to complete audio-visuals;
- e. Ephemera and private communication: correspondence, sketches, emails,

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Skype conversations, SMS, WhatsApp and phone calls (fragments, segments, etc.).

Concerning the field-work methodology, the author has followed the participant observation approach, where observation is seen as a way to collect data in 'naturalistic settings by ethnographers who observe and/or take part in the common and uncommon activities of the people being studied (DeWalt and DeWalt 2002).<sup>7</sup>

Each of the described settings has provided an approximate number of 10 general informants, and 3 key-informants purposefully elicited (presence of JSF, willingness to participate in the study, being interviewed and audio- or video-recorded).

Subject 1 – ethnic group: Amhara; language: Amharic

The first subject was born and raised in the capital Addis Ababa by Amhara parents. He is 24 years old, and works in several local clubs as a Reggae and Dancehall disc-jockey (DJ). Consequently, in his case, the primary source of contact with JSF is music.

Subject 2 – ethnic group: Oromo; language: Afaan Oromo

The second subject was born and raised in Shashamane, in the Oromia regional state, from Oromo parents. He is 17 years old, and he is a student at the local school, established by the Jamaican Rastafarian Development Community, a local organization formed by the original members of the repatriated community.

Subject 3 – ethnic group: Tigray; language: Tigrinya

The third subject was born in Axum, Tigray, and raised in various regions of the country (Tigray, Benishangul-Gumuz, SNNPR). He is 24 years old and works in a restaurant in Hawassa, the capital of the SNNPR regional state.

In his case, the contact with JSF takes place through two different channels: music, like Subject1, and tourism. Axum is an extremely popular tourist destination, and this provided Subject3 an opportunity to work as a tour guide. A further consequence of his role as tour guide is that he has been exposed to many different languages.<sup>8</sup> He reports that many of the tourists he remembers were

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<sup>7</sup> More specifically, considering the prior cultural and linguistic competencies of the author, the model of moderate participation has been adopted in order to maintain the necessary neutral position of an objective observer, as defined by J.P. Spradley (1980). As he points out: 'Moderate participation occurs when the ethnographer seeks to maintain a balance between being an insider and an outsider, between participation and observation.'

<sup>8</sup> Before specific regulations were imposed to control the tourist-guide system, many locals used to provide tour services, especially children and students. The fees, as well as the quality of the services provided, were very low, but they could offer the visitors unconventional tours and unexpected experiences. In many cases, these young tour

Rastafarians visiting their Promised land.<sup>9</sup> Notwithstanding their different origins (the US, the Caribbean, Europe, America, Australia or the rest of Africa), these visitors used JSF as a lingua franca.

The survey relies on an integrated model of conventions for conversation analysis, taking into account multiple elements directly related to the influence of the Jamaican 'way of communicating', in particular: presence of JSF, translanguaging, particular gestural and proxemic activities (Tomei, 2015). Regarding the intricate and challenging issue of transcription techniques, I adopted the method developed by the Jamaican Language Unit (Di Jamiekan Langwij Yuunit) of the University of the West Indies, using the model proposed by Frederic Cassidy in 1961. In *Ou Fi Rait Jamiekan - Writing Jamaican the Jamaican Way* (2009), the research team lead by Devonish made a first attempt to 'represent the sounds of the language as faithfully as possible, without relying on the spelling conventions of English. It is an approach to spelling Jamaican which treats it as a language in its own right rather than as a form of English' (Jamaican Language Unit, 2009).<sup>10</sup>

This method, called 'The Cassidy-JLU Writing System', adopts a one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds as shown by the examples in the following table.

Ex.	Cassidy-JLU Writing System	Standard English
1	Skuul	School
2	Tiicha	Teacher
3	Siks	Six
4	Kwiol	Creole
5	Piis	Peace
6	Kyaahn	Can't
7	Tuu	Two
8	Taim	Time
9	Lou	Low
10	Ruol	Role

guides had no training: self-education was the standard practice, in particular in the linguistic field.

<sup>9</sup> Axum is the place where, according to the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition, the Ark of the Covenant (containing the Tables with the Ten Commandments) has been brought by Menelik I, son of King Solomon of Jerusalem. This element reinforces the Rastafarian conception of Ethiopia as the Promised Land, the place chosen by God to establish his earthly throne. (Phillipson, 1998; Hay-Stuart and Grierson, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> The Unit based at the University of the West Indies, Kingston has launched important projects based on transcriptions of oral sources. The use of audio-visual translation from Jamaican to English, and from English to Jamaican has been successfully implemented by the Unit in the important project based on the translation of the King James Bible into Jamaican. The Bible was successfully launched in book form in 2012 (*Di Jamiekan Nyuu Testament/The Jamaican New Testament*).

11	Niem	Name
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**Table 2: Examples of Cassidy-JLU Writing System with equivalents in Standard English.**

As shown by the table:

The letter /c/ does not exist: it is replaced by /k/ch/s/, respectively in example n. 1, 2 and 5.

1. The letter /x/ is not used: it is replaced by /ks/, as in example n. 3.
2. The letter /q/ is not used: the form /qu/ is replaced by /kw/, as in example n. 4.
3. In addition to the vowels /a/e/i/o/u/, three 'long vowels' (/ii/aa/uu) and four 'double vowels' (/ai/ou/uo/ie) are used, respectively in examples 5, 6, 7 and 8, 9, 10, 11.
4. The form /hn/ is often adopted as a vocal suffix indicating the nasalization of the vowel, as in example 6.

#### 4. Data presentation and discussion

For the data analysis, I took into account markers operating at morpho-syntactical level, at discourse level (oral interactions, group conversations), and at intertextual level (use of jargon, media-derived language).

More specifically, the use of language by the three subjects was addressed and analyzed through the identification of significant markers as follows:

1. Grammar (nouns, pronouns, verbs, negations) and pronunciation (metathesis, substitutions);
2. Cultural features (interjections and expressions, Rastafarian/Reggae usage)
3. Lexis (affixation and suffixation, 1<sup>st</sup> person conceptualization, forms of greetings and address).

##### a. Grammar and pronunciation

As Frederic Cassidy has said: 'the most striking differences between the folk speech of Jamaica and the educated speech are not in the sounds, still less in the vocabulary – they are in the grammar, the functional patterns into which the words fall' (Cassidy, 1961).

Furthermore, there are several items in the corpus featuring constant translanguaging. Here only a small sample of pertinent data from the corpus can be presented to illustrate the issue.

The presented extracts feature first a literal or semantic transcription, then a pragmatic rendering into SE (glo%).

Extract n.1 – Subject 1

## CULTUS

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Languages: @1 Amharic, @2 Standard English, @3 Jamaican speech forms  
June 2011 – Interview in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

\*ME: Can you give me an example of what Jamharic is?

@2

\*SUB2: Nachral! wi lov **Jamharic**, yu no? **ca it a di** best mix

@3

Wi seh **'yow, wha a gwaan@3 ante?@1'** or **'Irie@3 nou?@1'**

%glo: Natural! We love Jamharic, you know? Because it is the  
best mix

We say 'Ehy, what's going on, you? or 'Are you alright?'

Extract n.2 – Subject 2

Languages: @3 Jamaican speech forms

July 2015- Interview in Shashamane, Ethiopia

\*SUB1: Yahman, **uen mi baan piipl dem did seh mi** luk laik

Selassie-I@3

I don't know why@2 **bot a dat dem seh @3**

%glo: Yes, when I was born people said I look like  
Selassie

I don't know why but they say so.

Extract n.3 – Subject 3

Languages: @2 Standard English, @3 Jamaican speech forms

February 2017 – Phone conversation (from Hawassa, Ethiopia)

\*ME: Breda @3, where are you going to live now?@2

\*SUB3: **Mi nah no** man! @3 I don't even have a house now!@2

**Yu donno seh, mi a go make it wid da likkle moni**  
**mi av@3**

Just pray for me@2

%glo: I don't know man I don't even have a house  
now!

You don't know, I will make it with the little money I  
have

Just pray for me

\*ME: What about your family? @2

\*SUB3: **Chru, chru..bot dem chrang man!@3**

%glo: True, true..but they (are) strong man!

The following distinctive elements of Jamaican Creole can be observed in the extracts provided above:

4. copula (/A/ copula: Ex1: 'it a di best' - No copula: Ex2:'mi baan'; Ex3: 'dem chrang');
5. nouns/pronouns (Ex2: 'mi baan', 'mi laik'; Ex3: 'mi nah no');

6. verbs (Past: Ex2: ‘dem did seh’ – Future: Ex3: ‘mi a go make it’);
7. phoneme substitution (Ex3: ‘likkle’).

There is also a recurrent use of exclamations and exclamatory remarks: these abound in the Jamaican lexicon which is rich in strings of utterances (Patrick, 1999). Jamaican culture-specific utterances are also interspersed with repetitive occurrences (Ex1: ‘nachral’; Ex2: ‘yahman’; Ex3: ‘chru, chru’).

With reference to translanguaging, in extract n.1 we can observe the presence of Jamarigna, or Jamharic, a new speech form previously described by the author (Tomei 2005): ‘Irie nou?’ = Irie (JSF) and Nou (Amharic).

#### b. Specific cultural features

The contact between Ethiopians and Jamaicans (mainly members of the Rastafari movement) has also fostered the acquisition of extra-linguistic features, providing an unprecedented opportunity to investigate the cultural contamination and exchange taking place between a group of Africans in the Diaspora and local Africans on the Continent.

Extract n.4 – Subject 1

Languages: @2 Standard English, @3 Jamaican speech forms

December 2016 – Text message sent from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

\*SUB1: Greetings Ras!@3 Here many problems@2 still iman fi resist@3  
and keep out of trouble@2. Iman know we go prevail@3  
good over evil@2 mi seh!@3

%glo: Greetings! Here many problems, still **I have to resist**  
And keep out of trouble. I know **we will prevail**

**Good over evil** I say!

Extract n.5 – Subject 2

Languages: @3 Jamaican speech forms

May 2011 – Interview in Shashamane

\*SUB1: All di Jamiekian piipl dem...dem a Iithiopian, dem African, yu  
siit? @3

Bicas a di wait piipl, dem a sliev dem an put dem ina ailan still,  
yu no? @3

So yu donno she, wi a uan blod! @3

%glo: All the **Jamaican people, they are Ethiopian,**  
**they are African,** you see it?

Because the white people enslaved them and put them  
in an island still, you know?

So you don't know say, **we are one blood!**

Extract n.6 – Subject 3

Languages: @1 Amharic, @2 Standard English, @3 Jamaican speech forms

June 2015 – Conversation in Hawassa, Ethiopia

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\*SUB1: Dem affi overstand all a wi a African@3 and unity is our strength@2

Without this, there is no future my brother@2 gabbah?@1

%glo: They have to understand **all of us are Africans, and that unity is our strength**

Without this, there is no future my brother, do you understand?

The 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> selected extracts, above, highlight the effects of cultural transmission and recontextualization. One of the key principles of the Rastafari faith movement is Pan-Africanism, a concept which finds new definitions and meanings when its seed is transplanted into the soil of the only unconquered country of Africa (Ex.5: ‘Jamaican people are African’, ‘we are one blood’; Ex.6: ‘all of us are Africans’, ‘unity is our strength’).

Furthermore, spiritual and religious references are a constant element of their linguistic practice (Ex1: ‘we will prevail, good over evil’ – here the reference is to the Book of Revelation. The Lion of Judah prevails, opens the seven seals, and testifies the victory of good over evil).

Greetings and salutations follow the ritual of Rastafarian greetings and blessings (Ex1: ‘greetings Ras’). Such acquired formulas used at the beginning of conversations and as rituals of conclusions are accompanied by codified gestures and expressions (Pollard, 2003).

## 5. Conclusion

On the basis of the data gathered during field research, the present article provides an account of an unprecedented phenomenon, impacting the linguistic scenario of Ethiopia and counteracting linguistic policies and trends: the use of JSF as a lingua franca within different ethnic groups in the country.

The recent Oromo civil and political unrest has been used as a platform to voice discontent over government repression of all the ethnic groups in Ethiopia, paving the way for the upsurge of ethnic nationalism among them. The possible political scenario, exacerbating ethnic diversities, could produce a general disengagement from the national language Amharic, in favour of more unrestrictive linguistic policies based on the exclusion of Amharic as a common lingua franca.

In contrast with this ethnic-based approach of current linguistic policies, the spontaneous acquisition of JSF in Ethiopia defines new perspectives in the national scenario. In this context, JSF seem to represent a common code, shared by the youth across different ethnic groups, regional states and political parties, and is now assuming the role of supra-regional lingua franca.

The presence and the spread of JSF in the area under scrutiny was unplanned, as it is perceived as an educationally non-existent language within the framework

of language policies in education, domestic and international communication, and juxtaposed to the use of international English. This suggests that, despite careful language planning, the community of speakers ultimately defines the development and use of language.

The phenomenon under scrutiny is well beyond the spread of Jamaican dancehall jargon and DJ-talk, reinforced by youth emulation and perceived prestige of rebellious and transgressive behaviour. It is a phenomenon localized in space and time, with unpredictable developments under the flow of shifting power dynamics, and well aligns with recent studies on the varieties of English language, further demonstrating the existence of a polycentric system and the decline of the idea of English as one language (Crystal 1997, 2003).

The spread and the role of JSF in different areas of the world may call for a refinement of the concept of English Linguistic Imperialism as defined by Phillipson (1992). Combining the theory of 'hegemonic centre', derived from the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci, to that of the the role of the English language on a global scale, Phillipson concludes that "A working definition of English linguistic imperialism is that the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages. Here structural refers broadly to material properties (for example, institutions, financial allocations) and cultural to immaterial or ideological properties (for example, attitudes, pedagogic principles)." (Phillipson, 1992: 47).

The fact that JSF is influencing the linguistic scenario of Ethiopia, with particular reference to youth-talk or juvenile jargon, argues against the usual dynamics of language and power, centre and periphery. It shows how immaterial and ideological properties produced by one of the many centres (in this case the Caribbean) can reverberate and spread, designing new and different linguistic horizons.

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***The absentee language:  
the role of Italian in the work of expatriate writers  
in Italy***

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*Abstract*

*This paper sets out to examine a cross-section of books by native English speakers who recount via first-person narration their experience of taking up residence in Italy and moving into a new house, focusing primarily on how their relationship with the Italian language is described. It will be argued that little reference is made to what is arguably the greatest obstacle of all when English speakers and non-Italians in general put down roots in Italy – tackling everyday life and establishing new relationships in a language which they barely know. Central to the analysis will be the reporting of the direct speech of the protagonists of these works, particularly when the language of the original exchange must be Italian. This will lead onto the issues of polylingual discourse through a generally monolingual medium, of stancing between native and non-native speakers, and of how a number of the factors discussed can contribute to excessively seductive representations of Italian life. Lastly it will be suggested that the concept of target orientation, usually applied within the domain of studies on translation, may provide insights into the approaches adopted by the authors of the works examined, perhaps disclosing a general reluctance to engage with the linguistic and psychological difficulties inherent in learning a new language in a foreign land.*

## **Introduction**

Eric Newby's 1994 work *A Small Place in Italy*, which like all the books to be analysed in this paper offers an interesting and often humorous description of an English speaker's experience of living in Italy and buying a house there, contains an unexpected aside just three chapters from the end. It turns out that Newby's neighbour is a belligerent farmer, furious about some rights of way, who regularly drives his tractor a whisker away from where the author and his wife are eating or relaxing in their garden. Just one chapter is devoted to this matter shortly before the book reaches its conclusion, though Newby mentions that the problem with the neighbour was a persistent feature of almost all the time period covered by the narration, involving a court case that was resolved only after fifteen years.

For this particular reader that isolated chapter provoked a curious feeling of

dissatisfaction, almost as if, however good the food was, the main course had somehow been missing. Clearly a scenario of this type would cast a long shadow over the courageous and joyous decision of a non-Italian to leave her/his native land and relocate to an old house deep in the Italian countryside. A similar sensation of something missing prevails when I read other works by English speakers providing accounts of their new life in Italy, but this time it is on a linguistic level: in most of these books little reference is made to what is arguably the greatest obstacle of all when English speakers and non-Italians in general put down roots in Italy – tackling everyday life and establishing new relationships in a language which they barely know. While difficulties of various other natures are liberally discussed – for example house renovation, acquisition of residence documents, buying a car, adapting to local driving – the inevitable language hurdles are often treated summarily or indeed not at all.

This paper sets out to examine a cross-section of books by native English speakers who recount via first-person narration their experience of taking up residence in Italy and moving into a new house, focusing principally on the question of how their relationship with the Italian language is or is not portrayed. Central to the analysis will be the reporting of the direct speech of the protagonists of these works, particularly when the language of the original exchange must be Italian. This will lead to considerations upon the issues of (i) polylingual discourse through a generally monolingual medium, (ii) of stancing between native and non-native speakers of a language, and (iii) of how a number of the factors discussed can contribute to excessively seductive representations of Italian life. Lastly it will be suggested that the concept of target orientation, usually applied within the domain of studies on translation, may provide insights into the approaches adopted by the authors of the works examined in this paper. These works are (the dates given are those of the first editions):

- Niall Allsop *Scratching the Toe of Italy: Expecting the Unexpected in Calabria* (2012)
- Ivanka Di Felice *A Zany Slice of Italy* (2014) [set in Abruzzo and Tuscany]
- Veronica Di Grigoli *The Dangerously Truthful Diary of a Sicilian Housewife* (2015)
- Chris Harrison *Head over Heel: Seduced by Southern Italy* (2010) [set mostly in Puglia]
- Annie Hawes *Extra Virgin: Amongst the Olive Groves of Liguria* (2001)
- Simon Mawer *A Place in Italy* (2002) [set in a town near Rome]
- Ian R. McEwan *Pan' e Pomodor: My Passage to Puglia* (2012)
- Eric Newby *A Small Place in Italy* (1994) [set in Liguria]
- Tim Parks *Italian Neighbours: An Englishman in Verona* (1994)
- Clare Pedrick *Chickens Eat Pasta: Escape to Umbria* (2015)
- Mark Rotella *Stolen Figs and Other Adventures in Calabria* (2004)

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- Paul Wright *An Italian Home: Settling by Lake Como* (2011)

I shall also make reference to James Hamilton-Paterson's (2004) *Cooking with Fernet Branca* and to my own *Crossing the Cultural Divide: the Gaffes of an Englishman in Italy* (2012), but solely for the purposes of comparison inasmuch as these works lie on a different axis with respect to the others, firstly because they have fictional protagonists, secondly because they have either third-person narration (*Crossing the Cultural Divide*) or more than one first-person narrator (*Cooking with Fernet Branca*), and thirdly because the scenario of moving into a new house is not described.

First of all, let us consider the question of the protagonists' degree of familiarity with Italian, and how this is conveyed in the respective stories.

### 1. The protagonists' language skills in Italian<sup>1</sup>

As one would expect, the Italian language competence of the respective protagonists at the beginning of each book varies considerably, as does their ability to learn.

#### 1.1 Protagonists whose language skills in Italian appear to be good at the start of the book

These characters can be broken down into (i) those who have previous experience of living in Italy, for example Nicola in *An Italian Home* (throughout the paper I shall use shortened titles to refer to the works examined), Tim in *Italian Neighbours*, and presumably Veronica in *The Dangerously Truthful Diary*, though the protagonist's clearly good knowledge of Italian is never properly explained; (ii) those who have studied Italian at university, for example Clare in *Chickens Eat Pasta*, (iii) those whose parents or relatives are Italian and who consequently acquired knowledge of the language as they grew up – Mark in *Stolen Figs*, Ian's wife M in *Pan' e Pomodor*, David in *A Zany Slice of Italy*. Included in this category is the protagonist's wife C in *A Place in Italy*, though she is in fact Maltese.

#### 1.2 Protagonists who initially have little or no Italian but who gradually make progress

Books with protagonists of this nature tend to devote greater attention to language questions, from the complexity of the Italian language (*Head over Heel*, *An Italian Home*, *A Place in Italy*), to gaffes arising from their shortcomings in Italian (*Head over Heel*, *An Italian Home*, *A Place in Italy*), to transcriptions of dialect

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<sup>1</sup> As a rule I shall refer to (non-Italian) 'protagonists' rather than 'narrators' because not all the protagonists of these works are narrators, for example David in *A Zany Slice of Italy* and Nicola in *An Italian Home*.

(*Pan' e Pomodor*). Some of the protagonists make good progress in Italian (Chris in *Head over Heel*), while others find the learning process more arduous, for example Niall and his wife Kay in *Scratching the Toe of Italy*, Ivanka in *A Zany Slice of Italy*, Ian in *Pan' e Pomodor*, Paul in *An Italian Home*.

## 2. How is the protagonists' Italian language expertise / lack of expertise reported in the narrative?

Here too the variation is considerable. The main strategies are as follows.

### 2.1 Reporting of language errors

Reporting of this nature often entails errors of comprehension or confusion between similar-sounding terms: Chris in *Head over Heel* (p.82) asks for *un pedofilo* (a paedophile) instead of *un pedalò* (a pedalo); in *An Italian Home* (Ch.2) Paul interprets the button *LUCE* (light) in an apartment block as someone's surname, and he and his wife Nicola are mischievously told by locals that the village policeman's name is *Signor Pompino* (Mr Blow Job) and subsequently address him as such (Ch.4); the protagonist of *A Place in Italy* wonders, when a woman introduces herself as Grazia, what he had done to deserve thanks (Ch.1), and later (Ch.2) exclaims that his wife *non è pregnante* (she isn't meaningful) instead of *non è incinta* (she's not pregnant). Many errors of this nature are reported in the opening chapters of *Crossing the Cultural Divide*, for instance when Hugh thinks that *devo rimettere* corresponds to 'I have to replace it' rather than 'I'm going to be sick' (pp. 92-93).

### 2.2 Allusions to the protagonist's language level

Allusions of this type may be implicit or explicit.

#### 2.2.1 Implicit allusions to language level

In *The Dangerously Truthful Diary* (Ch.2), we find "Dictionary in hand, I phoned him [Valentino, Veronica's future husband] back"; in *A Zany Slice of Italy* (Ch.7), Ivanka writes "I'm exhausted, having had to concentrate so intently on trying to understand not only Italian but the local dialect"; in *Head over Heel* Chris speaks to his Sicilian mother-in-law about the way she has coped with her sick husband: "I told Valeria as best I could that I admired her courage" (p. 89), and in *Crossing the Cultural Divide* it is narrated that Hugh "let loose some more of his Italian" on a woman in a supermarket (pp. 46-47). All of these instances are implicit indications that the respective protagonists' Italian is not yet up to scratch. Later in *Head over Heel* (p.65), when Chris and his Italian girlfriend Daniela have to deal with (in Italian) an obtuse *carabiniere* concerning a stolen credit card, we read "No later, though,' I joked in English. 'The restaurant closes at eleven.'" The fact that

Chris makes this comment in English again implicitly suggests problems in Italian, above all because (i) the comment is not complex, and (ii) the chances of the obtuse *carabiniere* understanding him in English are remote.

### 2.2.2 *Explicit allusions to language level*

These comprise more descriptive references to the protagonists' knowledge or lack of knowledge in Italian, sometimes with examples of this supplied.

In *A Zany Slice of Italy* (Ch.7), Ivanka writes of her "very limited broken Italian", Paul in *An Italian Home* (Ch.9) writes: "I still hadn't gained enough confidence to converse unaided", later bemoaning (ibid) his "stubborn resistance to speak Italian". Tim in *Italian Neighbours* (first chapter entitled 'Afa') understands around 80 per cent of what is spoken directly to him, and around 50 per cent of what is merely said in his presence; Chris in *Head over Heel* (p. 26) suspects that his "rudimentary Italian" is playing tricks on him; and in *The Dangerously Truthful Diary* we are informed of Veronica's "terribly rusty Italian" (Ch.1). Other references are more elaborate, for instance in Mawer's *A Place in Italy* (Ch.2):

In those early days my knowledge of Italian was patchy. Understanding jumped from one familiar word to another with little but guesswork to help me with what went on in between. It was like watching a scene by the light of a stroboscope: what happened in the darkness was the essential part, the part that made sense of the fixed and frozen images – but that was the part denied me.

Some allusions to language levels are more humorous. In *Scratching the Toe of Italy* Niall (chapter entitled 'Living in a foreign language') has "sledgehammer Italian" due to his Northern Irish accent; in *Extra Virgin* the narrator writes "I gesticulate and gibber in my daft foreign way, trying to communicate where I've come from, pointing to the other side of the valley" (p. 77); in *Head over Heel* it is pointed out that the doctor's parrot speaks better Italian than Chris (p. 49); in *Crossing the Cultural Divide* we are informed that Hugh's heavily-accented Italian makes him sound like an English upper-class twit (p. 48). Very occasionally we are informed of improvements made by the protagonists, for example in *Head over Heel* (p. 41): "In improving Italian I recounted the tale of the lazy immigration police at Rome airport".

### 2.3 *Discussions about language learning*

Focused discussions of language learning feature in just two of the works analysed.

Niall in *Scratching the Toe of Italy* (chapter entitled 'Living in a Foreign Language') provides a number of insights that are likely to be revealing for the target reader, for example that dubbed Italian is as a rule easier to understand

than original Italian; that so many English words have been absorbed into Italian; the disadvantage of not being a native speaker of a Romance language such as Romanian when learning Italian; the fact that the elderly locals make no allowances for the protagonist's linguistic shortcomings, talking to him as naturally as they would to a friend from the village. Niall observes ruefully that "We had expected that, living in the country [i.e., in Italy], we would assimilate the language reasonably quickly. We were so, so wrong."

Paul's discussion of language learning in *An Italian Home* takes the form of a series of reminders to the reader concerning the immense problems he has speaking and understanding Italian – indeed it becomes one of the main themes of the work with entire chapters devoted to it – in part because he is (reluctantly) shielded by his wife Nicola, whose Italian is very good. In both these works are included reflections upon the psychological implications of the respective protagonists' shortcomings in Italian, an issue which I shall return to in Section 5 below.

### 3. Direct speech

The previous section described strategies adopted to convey the protagonists' level of Italian, though it needs to be stressed that, on the whole, indications of language levels are few and far between in these works. One of the reasons for this may be that it is not easy to report Italian-language merits or faults 'live', so to speak, or at least inscribed in direct speech, in that although a substantial slice of the conversations reported in these works must have originally taken place in Italian, they are of course always converted into English. Now since it would clearly not work to repeatedly relay the protagonists' imperfect Italian in imperfect English,<sup>2</sup> this gives rise to the issue of whether authors should use

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<sup>2</sup> A successful example of this in film is to be found towards the end of Richard Curtis' film *Love Actually* (2003). Jamie, an Englishman played by Colin Firth, falls in love with his Portuguese maid Aurelia while on holiday in France though he never declares his love, returns to London where he does a crash course in Portuguese and then flies out to Portugal to find his sweetheart and propose to her on the spot. He eventually finds the restaurant where she works as a waitress, and before a crowd of surprised clients, as well as half the village that has come along for the ride, asks for Aurelia's hand in very imperfect Portuguese. As he does this his Portuguese is subtitled in similarly imperfect English:

*Beautiful Aurelia. I've come here with a view to asking you to marriage me. I know I seems an insane person because I hardly knows you. But sometimes things are so transparency, they don't need evidential proof. And I will inhabit here, or you can inhabit with me in England. Of course I don't expecting you to be as foolish as me, and of course I prediction you say 'no'. But it's Christmas and I just wanted to check.*

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direct speech at all (in English) in order to report the Italian dialogue of the protagonists. If the protagonists are assigned an abundance of direct speech to convey their interactions with the locals then this might give the false impression that their Italian is perfect, whilst if they are assigned scant or no direct speech this may create the undesirable impression that they converse with the locals very little, however much indirect discourse is adopted. This question will be examined in more detail in the following section.

### *3.1. The implications of direct speech*

An Italian reader of *Crossing the Cultural Divide* once asked me the Italian equivalent of “There she blows” (p.224) in a chapter concerning a disagreement about the communal cesspit at a condominium meeting. As I gamely struggled to provide a decent rendering, the reader, looking more and more mystified, then exclaimed: ‘But why is it so hard to translate? After all, you actually said it in a discussion which must have been in Italian!’

Surprised by this remark, I pointed out firstly that despite the autobiographical thrust of the work it was the protagonist Hugh, and not I, who had made the comment, and secondly that the event described had taken place around fifteen years before the book was written, so the discussion reported was perforce a reconstruction. At this the reader reacted as if I had just committed perjury, exclaiming ‘But it’s in inverted commas!’

Notwithstanding the naivety of this reaction it afforded considerable food for thought, confirming that inverted commas are a powerful presence, though of course direct speech may be signalled by other conventions of layout, such as dashes, indenting with new line etc. (Thompson 1996: 512). The tradition of assuming across the board that quotations are verbatim reports of original utterances resisted relatively unchallenged until recent times (for discussion see Clark and Gerrig 1990: 795), but has now been stigmatised by some as a “reproductive fallacy” (Sternberg 1981: 237). It is important to underline, however, that the verbatim assumption is register- and genre-dependent: it is more cogent when the register is for instance scientific, academic or legal (Thompson 1996: 512), but much weaker, for example, in spontaneous conversation (Tannen 2007: 112). Fiction is an interesting case, because any direct speech in fiction, like the rest of the work, is non-factual anyway, but direct speech is used nonetheless in order to present sequences of oral speech as original utterances, or better in order to make a faithfulness claim which, as pointed out by Semino and Short (2004:12-13) “brings with it associated effects of vividness and dramatization”, being more “foregrounded, vivid and immediate

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The success of this strategy lies in the simultaneity of the subtitles with Jamie’s proposal in Portuguese.

as compared with an IS [indirect speech] version”. Similarly, Thompson (1996: 512) cites two main functions of direct quotations in written English: the first is to indicate a higher degree of faithfulness to an original language event, and the second is to present the reported language event more vividly by simulating the original utterance.

This also applies to the genre of autobiography, and therefore to the main works analysed in this paper inasmuch as they have a predominantly autobiographical flavour – the name of the author almost always coincides with the name of the first-person narrator (in Mawer’s *A Place in Italy* the narrator-protagonist remains unnamed). At the same time it seems important to make some sort of distinction between on the one hand the use of direct speech in fiction and on the other the use of direct speech in autobiographical or semi-autobiographical works, because readers of the latter may well work on the verbatim assumption, not only interpreting the events described as having actually occurred but also construing the speech events reported as having actually been produced, thus decodifying direct speech as word-for-word representation.

The drawback of this type of decodification in the works considered here is that in so many instances the speech reported in inverted commas must have originally taken place in Italian, in which case the word-for-word interpretation, i.e., that the author replicates exactly what was uttered, is automatically excluded. The reader who had asked about “There she blows” had taken the passage in question to be the faithful *translation* of an oral exchange, and it is here that some ambiguity arises. To provide an idea of this ambiguity I shall focus firstly on Veronica Di Grigoli’s *The Dangerously Truthful Diary* and then remark on other works.

### 3.1.1 *Direct speech in The Dangerously Truthful Diary*

At the beginning of this entertaining book we are informed – as mentioned above – that the Italian of the English protagonist Veronica is “terribly rusty” (Ch.1), and that when she visits relatives in Sicily she carries a dictionary around with her in case she gets lexically stuck. This implies that she previously had knowledge of Italian before going to Sicily, though it is not explained how or to what degree she acquired it; rapid mention is made of previous experiences in the north of Italy but nothing more. However, once she gets together with her future husband Valentino, who speaks hardly any English, Veronica’s Italian at once appears to improve exponentially. Two days after they meet – and two days after she had been reaching for her dictionary – she is reported as saying to him (Ch.3) “I love the dim candle lighting and the cool smell of dampness”, and three weeks later she suggests to a local builder (Ch.4): “There’s a lintel and you could take out this piece of wall”. During the same meeting her powers of comprehension are nothing short of prodigious when Valentino says:

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I don't want the builders trying to rectify anything related to horizontal surfaces ... I went round the house with that piece of piping you used and everything slopes downwards away from the drainage holes. I asked one of the builders to lend me his spirit level and, just to test him, I asked him to show me how it works. He explained that the bubble 'sinks down to the bottom' so you have to get that angled towards the place you want the water to drain to.

Veronica – who is not a builder or architect by trade – far from looking bewildered or reaching for her dictionary, replies with the question: “Did you teach him how spirit levels work?”. Then in Chapter 8, just a few months on, Veronica gives Valentino a complex explanation about a classical temple: “Next, they had to get the base and columns perfectly perpendicular. They used plumb lines ... They used string to measure distances, and they used shadows to work out angles and lengths on the ground.”

One reading of this is that Veronica's command of Italian seems to progress astonishingly within a very short time. However, as suggested above, there is the risk of taking translated direct speech too literally. It could be argued that the reported conversations are not to be read as translations of precisely what was said, but as reconstructions: that in reality Veronica's Italian has not improved implausibly, and that the inverted commas are no more than a rhetorical device designed to lighten the narration and render it more vivid.

### 3.1.2 *Direct speech in other works*

The same issue applies to many of the other works studied here, with any number of dialogues which must have originally been conducted in Italian reported in inverted commas. Hugh's verbal exchanges in *Crossing the Cultural Divide* – most of them originally in Italian – are a feast of inverted commas, while Ian in *Pan' e pomodor* has by his own admission a poor command of Italian but at one point asks the local men renovating his house (chapter entitled ‘Spring of surprises’): “What about the thickness of the walls? Does that count as volume? What about the vaults and the ceiling space? Can we deduct some volume there?” Further, Ian understands the technical reply to these questions apparently without effort:

If we put the profile of the land behind the house against the cross-section, then technically part of the existing structure is underground ... if we calculate the volume that is technically underground, then maybe we could deduct it from the overall volume and provide space for the extensions.

Chris in *Head over Heel*, whose deficiencies in Italian are stressed on a number of occasions, is stopped in Puglia by two police officers with whom he has an animated discussion in Italian (we know it is in Italian because the narrative

indicates this, though in any case it is extremely unlikely that police officers in Puglia would speak English so fluently). I include only the protagonist's side of the argument:

Don't tell me you're going to fine me because this is the wrong sort of road to have my headlights on? [...] This fucking country is an absolute fucking mess ... [A crow caws] And the crow agrees with me. [...] I said I won't allow you to fine me for driving with my lights on just because I'm on the wrong sort of road [...] By telling you that the report I saw on the news said the lights must be on at all times on all roads. It didn't say anything about the type of road [...] They weren't on high beam so what can you do about it? Are you going to book me because the stereo was too loud as well? [...] What a backward system. A million laws only nobody tells the police what they are (pp.197-198).

Considering that when we react furiously to something we may struggle to articulate our thoughts even in our native language, the protagonist's linguistic performance in Italian is apparently superlative.

In passing it should be noted that inverted commas can also give the impression that *Italians* know *English* rather too well. In *A Zany Slice of Italy* (Ch.12) the elderly peasant Salvatore, who as far as we know speaks no English, "slowly shuffles behind us, the whole time muttering and shaking his head and his fist. I occasionally make out the words 'bloody hell!'"

It is perhaps the case, then, that – given their frequency – we should not give too literal a reading to inverted commas, that the fact that they are reported in perfect English should not induce us to believe that they are originally uttered in perfect Italian.

Nevertheless, a nagging element of ambivalence remains. Another reader of *Crossing the Cultural Divide* once objected to the improbability of the protagonist making all sorts of Italian-language gaffes during the first part of the book and then miraculously producing perfect Italian during the second part, yet during that second part all the protagonist's Italian conversations are reported in English and no appraisal of his Italian is offered by the narrator. Further, it seems significant that certain other authors of this genre occupy the other end of the spectrum as far as direct speech is concerned, in that they give the impression of wishing to keep it to a minimum, especially that of the protagonist(s). In *A Zany Slice of Italy*, *Scratching the Toe of Italy*, *An Italian Home*, *Chickens Eat Pasta* and *A Small Place in Italy* the verbal contributions of the protagonists in what was originally Italian are rarely reported directly (if present at all they normally take the form of brief interrogatives), but the contributions of (i) the Italian characters and (ii) the protagonists when they really are speaking English, are freely placed within inverted commas. For example the protagonist Eric in *A Small Place in Italy*

is an Englishman with limited Italian, while his wife Wanda is Slovenian but “had spent most of her formative years in Italy” (Ch.10). They communicate in English, and inverted commas are used liberally to convey their conversations. What is conspicuous, however, is that Eric is never quoted directly when the language of his conversations must have been Italian, notwithstanding the fact there would have been ample opportunity to do so since he freely mixes with the local people – at one point a chapter is devoted to his two-day hike across the mountains with a couple of local men, but no direct speech is reported.

A further strategy is simply to avoid adopting direct speech. In *Italian Neighbours* it is used sparingly, even though more or less direct interchanges are very occasionally included without inverted commas. Take for example an exchange between the narrator and the local policeman, who is confused as to why application for residency doesn’t exist in the UK (chapter entitled ‘Residenza’):

How was it possible, he asked, for us not to have residency?  
 We didn’t.  
 So what do you do? When you move.  
 You move, I said.  
 And the registration plates on the car?  
 You leave them as they are.  
 And your identity card?  
 There are no identity cards.  
 And the doctor?  
 You go and register at the nearest doctor’s office.

The use of the past tense in the opening comments of this exchange (How was it possible ... We didn’t) is already a step away from direct speech, but in any case the example is exceptional in that throughout the book the protagonist Tim is hardly ever assigned any sort of direct interchange. In *Extra Virgin*, on the other hand, direct exchanges are certainly present but inverted commas are again conspicuous by their absence. The author makes frequent use of ‘we say’, ‘we suppose’ etc. (the reference is to the narrator and her sister) to signpost their conversational exchanges with the locals:

You’re not going to replant the place with something else, then? he asks.  
 Of course not, we say, mystified. [...]  
 What about your husbands, he asks, after a longish pause. Do they have a lot of land? Are they farmers? Where are they?  
 Nowhere, we say, we aren’t married. [...]  
 What do people grow in your country, then? he asks.  
 Well, we say, potatoes we suppose. (Ch.5)

This absence of inverted commas is not uncommon when reporting direct speech in literature (Thompson 1996: 512) and one should think twice before reading too much into it, but overall it would seem that in most of the works under the microscope in this paper there is a certain reluctance to adopt direct speech in order to report the originally Italian utterances of the protagonists.

#### 4. Polylingual discourse through a monolingual medium

The main works examined in this paper thus show a tendency to avoid attributing direct speech to the protagonists, particularly when the original language of the conversational exchange is Italian. As suggested above, this could be because authors wish to avoid giving the impression that they themselves, *qua* protagonists, speak Italian effortlessly, or perhaps there is simply a certain reticence to engage with the Italian of the protagonists at all, the logic being perhaps that *in primis* these books are about Italy rather than about the protagonists, whose principal function is that of a conduit or observation platform. Also central, however, is the problem of representing bilingual or polylingual discourse through a medium which is usually monolingual.

Sternberg (1981: 223-226) identifies three main procedures adopted in literary works in order to circumvent this problem: (i) referential restriction, (ii) vehicular matching and (iii) the homogenising convention. Referential restriction “consists in confining the scope of the represented world to the limits of a single, linguistically uniform community whose speech patterns correspond to those of the implied audience” (223), for example the novels of Jane Austen, whereas vehicular matching, “far from avoiding linguistic diversity or conflict, accepts them as a matter of course [...] and sometimes deliberately seeks them out” (*ibid.*), for example in George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*. The homogenising convention “retains the freedom of reference while dismissing the resultant variations in the language presumably spoken by the characters as an irrelevant, if not distracting, representational factor” (224), for example Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, in which the Roman Antony and the Egyptian Cleopatra converse effortlessly.

The expatriate works discussed in this paper feature some vehicular matching, in that Italian lexis and even dialectal words are included sporadically. As Clark and Gerrig (1990: 784), underline “when authors choose the language for a quotation, they must accommodate to their own and their audience’s abilities [...] they leave words untranslated when it serves a purpose”. However, it is clear that the most relevant of Sternberg’s three categories to expat accounts is the homogenising convention. It is very widespread, and most of the time works well enough, but it comes with a heavy realistic price, because its monolingual vehicle is artificially imposed upon a heterolingual scenario. In both direct and indirect discourse “the omission of an overt notice makes it impossible to determine in

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which of the possible languages a certain language is constructed” (Sternberg 1981: 232).

## 5. Stancing between native and non-native speakers

This omission of overt notice produces a linguistic fog which conceals the potential complexity of language interplay for people who choose to move to a new country and tackle a foreign language. One could of course take the view that the original language of communication is unimportant – the vehicle used by the authors is English and no further questions need to be asked, rather like when in old English-language war films German officers speak to each other in English even where there is nobody else present, or when the American pope in Paolo Sorrentino’s *The Young Pope* (2016) has conversational exchanges exclusively in English with everybody he meets in Rome – cardinals, bishops, nuns, assistants, local people and even Roman primary school students. It can seem artificial but ultimately it may not matter, the vehicle of the film / series is English and that is all we need to know.

Personally, I am not convinced by this argument. A factor which contributes to the confidence and brilliance of the protagonist in *The Young Pope* is the fact that he (played by the actor Jude Law) is speaking his native language while most of the other characters are struggling with their grammar and pronunciation (a detail which of course disappears in the dubbing into Italian and presumably into other languages too), but it is of course a false representation because in reality almost all of the exchanges of the pope in the Vatican would be in Italian, and thus it is the non-Italian pope who should be struggling. The native / non-native question contributes to the stancing of any conversation between people of different languages, and is particularly crucial when you take up residence in a land with a native language different from your own, affecting your relationships with others and ultimately perhaps affecting your personality. For example, unless you are particularly feisty you will tend to speak much less than the locals in your conversations with them, you may concede arguments with which you do not entirely agree simply because you are not in possession of the linguistic weapons with which to put up a fight, and even when you become reasonably proficient you will learn to avoid criticising the people and mores of your adopted country. It’s a lesson in humility. As Wright points out in *An Italian Home* (Ch.2): “Somebody who wishes to live in a foreign country and is a bit overfull of pride, and does not speak the language [...] will soon discover that his ego will take an awful battering [...] permanently living abroad can severely rock his confidence.”

Of the works examined here the only one to focus earnestly on how the native/non-native disparity can affect one’s relationship with Italians is Allsop’s *Scratching the Toe of Calabria*. In the chapter entitled ‘Living in a foreign language’

the protagonist Niall describes how the locals, though well-disposed to him and his wife – a retired English couple with barely any Italian – “were treating us a bit like children, but, hey, linguistically we *were* children”, and his most stimulating observation in this respect concerns the way in which his linguistic performance is influenced by how judgemental people are of his Italian (*ibid*):

It was something to do with whether or not I sensed, rightly or wrongly, that people were being judgemental about to what extent I was butchering their beautiful language; whether or not I observed that cringe, that wrinkling of the nose, that screwing up of the eyes, real or imagined, when I started to speak.

In one or two of the works examined there are even suggestions of the notion that the linguistically-challenged foreigner is handicapped. In *An Italian Home* (Ch.2) several locals in a village on Lake Como are puzzled as to why Paul’s wife Nicola, “an intelligent, elegant woman” proficient in Italian, took it into her head to hitch up with someone who is as linguistically hobbled in Italian as Paul, the subtext of this being that while Nicola is normal, her husband is a simpleton. In *Extra Virgin* the protagonist finds it refreshing to talk to small Italian children because she does not feel as “linguistically and culturally handicapped” (p. 229) as when she converses with adults.

As mentioned above, it is surprising how few references there are to this important psychological dynamic experienced by people who choose to live abroad and to take on a foreign language. On the contrary, the reporting of Italian conversations in English can provoke a substantial shift in the stancing, in the axis of power. Like *The Young Pope*, it is all too easy for the English-speaking protagonist to be assigned the upper hand, to be allocated a position of superiority. We have already seen an instance of this in 3.1.2 above from *Head over Heel*, where Chris defeats his Italian interlocutor’s arguments rather too confidently, but let us now consider a more telling example.

### 5.1 *Axis of power*

In James Hamilton-Paterson’s *Cooking with Fernet Branca*, the English protagonist and first-person narrator Gerald Samper is a writer who lives alone in the mountains not far from Viareggio. As stressed in the introduction to this paper, its clearly fictional status sits uneasily among almost all the other books examined in this article, but an example it provides is germane to the arguments discussed here. In the course of the book Samper almost always speaks English, either with friends from the UK or with other non-Italians. His contacts with local Italians are few and far between, he is often away from Italy on his travels, he does not have Italian origins, he was brought up in England, and we are not told of any studies he has undertaken in the Italian language. This notwithstanding, his

Italian comes across as flawless. In Chapter 36 Samper has a chance meeting with Benedetti, the estate agent – who as far as we know speaks no English – through whom the protagonist had bought his house the year before. After some pleasantries the protagonist makes a polite rebuke:

Allow me to observe, ingegnere, that in future you could be a lot more scrupulous about what you say when trying to induce someone to buy one of your houses. Especially a foreigner. We may be a minority but I think you will find that as a community we are not entirely without significance.

The protagonist goes on to identify the main source of his irritation, namely a noisy neighbour who has just moved in, at which point the estate agent protests that he cannot be expected to vouch for the behaviour of future neighbours. Samper's rejoinder is as follows:

True ... but you did give me verbal assurances whose validity a gentleman like yourself will readily recognise as scarcely less binding. At this late stage, though, I can't see how reparations can easily be made, can you? Things are as they regrettably are. I merely thought I would inform you that Le Roccie is very far from being the nexus of bucolic harmony you painted it to be last year (*ibid*).

The fact that the narrative vehicle of this conversation is English contributes to the superior, grandiloquent effect of the protagonist's speech, to the humour of the situation and to the fact that he effectively wipes the floor with his Italian interlocutor. The protagonist's lexical range and verbal dexterity in what must have been Italian (though in Sternberg's terms there is no overt notice of which language is being adopted), considering that elsewhere in the book he hardly ever opens his mouth in the language, are as enviable as they are miraculous.

### **6. Are readers sensitive to language code?**

I have suggested that the use of direct speech in these works risks projecting a false dynamic if it is assigned regularly to native English-speaking protagonists in dialogues which were originally in Italian – especially if the language is verbose – since it may give the impression that such characters are fluent in Italian and thus encounter no difficulties when they speak it, whether linguistic or psychological. It has also been pointed out that most authors – perhaps in part for this reason – keep to a minimum the direct speech of native English-speaking protagonists in 'Italian' dialogues, though dialogues that really do take place in English are not bound in this way. Other authors (above all Di Grigoli, Hamilton-Paterson,

Harrison, Stewart), on the other hand, do not seem overly concerned about this question, freely attributing direct speech to protagonists, whatever the situation or the original language, though it is surely significant that two of these works (Hamilton-Paterson, Stewart) have fictional protagonists.

A question that arises at this point is to what degree readers are conscious of all this. My conjecture is that they are barely aware of it, and therefore very unlikely to be disturbed by it, especially as in any case it is often unclear in the narratives which is the original language of the conversational exchange. In *A Zany Slice of Italy*, for instance, it is not always transparent in which language the protagonist's husband David, brought up in Canada of Italian parents, converses with his parents when they all meet in Italy, while in *Pan' e pomodor* it is unclear which language Ian speaks with his father-in-law. This kind of language ambivalence occurs most of all when it is a couple that moves to Italy, one of whom speaks Italian and one of whom is learning: David and Ivanka in *A Zany Slice of Italy*, Nicola and Paul in *An Italian Home*, Ian and M. in *Pan' e pomodor*, the protagonist and C. in *A Place in Italy*. In such cases one imagines that there would be a fair amount of code-switching which is then generalised into English in the narrative.

Indeed perhaps the only moment in which readers pause to reflect on the original language of communication in dialogues – aside from when (rarely) there is a language pointer in the narration – is when there are Italian characters reported abundantly in idiomatic English direct speech but then one of these characters makes a mistake (usually of grammar or pronunciation), for example the landlord in *A Place in Italy* (Ch.2) who says “Then the little house is not enough grand”; Ercolino in *Chickens Eat Pasta* (Ch.2), who describes the protagonist Clare as a “pain in the harse”; Daniela in *Head over Heel* (p.32), who comments “My father want to restore it”. The effect of this is sometimes abrupt – indeed at times one's initial reaction is to suspect a typo – because very often the reader has long forgotten that the Italian character in question really is speaking English.

Aside from this, it seems legitimate to suppose that readers would not concern themselves with questions of code at all, and that they would not deem it incongruous that much of what must have been said in Italian or in dialect is represented by English direct speech. And authors of this genre are probably right not to raise language questions excessively: discussions of language obstacles and too much Italian lexis interspersed in the narrative may jeopardise the smooth running of the story, inasmuch as the conveying of mistakes or difficulties in Italian is laborious for readers not familiar with the language. With this in mind it is surprising – and refreshing – that for example *Pan' e pomodor* (in particular the chapter entitled ‘Vicaio – the dialect’) dedicates so much attention to the local dialect.

Ultimately it is perhaps only foreign language operators (teachers, translators, mediators) such as myself who would be concerned about the original

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interchange and interaction of English and Italian in these books. Yet the narrative is affected by such questions, as will be discussed in the following section.

## 7. Seductive representations of Italy

In *Head over Heel* (p.154) there is a brief interlude in the narrative offering observations concerning the dreamy, seductive representations of Italy in films and travel writing (representations sometimes overstated by synopses published on the web: Parks' *Italian Neighbours*, for example, is simplistically described on Amazon as a 'deliciously seductive account ... for anyone who has ever dreamed about Italy'). Frances Meyes' *Under the Tuscan Sun* is sometimes cited in this respect, and this paper began with a reference to Eric Newby's *A Small Place in Italy*, in which the chapter focusing on a highly disagreeable circumstance concerning rights of way together with a consequent legal battle appears to have been included only out of a sense of authorial duty, and indeed seems somewhat out of place amid the amusing anecdotal tone of the rest of the book.

What is striking about the works analysed in this paper is that although they certainly do engage with less favourable aspects of residing in Italy (Harrison himself observes candidly that "Only those who stick around [in Italy] discover that the 'sweet life' can turn sour" (p.155)), most of them end up projecting all the same the oneiric image of expat life in Italy referred to by Harrison. In my view this paradox stems largely from the fact that the foreign language learning process and implications are seldom discussed. It is very rare that readers are properly apprised of the level of sweat, toil and frustration involved in learning a new language as an adult, and they remain almost completely unaware of the issue of stance – how a poor command of a language can force you to take a back seat, to yield ground and generally to behave differently, or can result in you not being taken as seriously as you would wish. In the 1995 film *A Walk in the Clouds* (Alfonso Arau) the Mexican patriarch admonishes a young American whom he suspects is trying to pull the wool over his eyes: "I may *speak* with an accent, but I don't *think* with an accent", but this inescapable part of the expatriate experience in Italy is scarcely mentioned.

In almost all cases the protagonists are either allotted a plethora of direct speech in their conversations in Italian, perhaps giving the impression of effortless fluency, or they are barely allotted direct speech at all, a strategy which, aside from creating an image of the protagonist as a curiously mute spectator, once again gives no signals as to the language struggle that the protagonist inevitably experiences, conveying the idea that language obstacles are absent. There may be sound editorial reasons for these strategies, but the upshot is that a large slice of the Italian experience of these expatriates is simply omitted, with the result that the representation of their autobiographical experiences is sanitised

and ultimately misleading.

## 8. The dominance of English

The picture which emerges is that language problems in Italian – and all the angst that so often accompanies them – are generally suppressed in favour of free-flowing narrative. This is in contrast with Italian characters' mistakes in English, which are much easier to report 'live' (*Head over Heel*: "I go to buy one [a water melon], should I?" (p.18), "It drivred my father crazy" (p.24), *Crossing the Cultural Divide*: "Are you feeling yourself well?" (p.41)) and which as a consequence become more conspicuous than the protagonists' errors in Italian. The outcome of this is a paradoxical reversal of roles: it is the protagonist who is the outsider, yet within the framework of the narrative it is frequently the Italian characters who are projected as the foreigners. On top of this, there is something dismissive about the recurrence with which Italian words in the various books – inserted in the narrative more often than not simply to give a playful touch of the exotic, a technique known in studies on tourist texts as 'linguaging' (see Cappelli 2008) – have grammar mistakes or are misspelt (*vigile urbane, la patenta, il scudetto, uno momento, strada provinciale, passeggiata, soprano, Ferragosta, porka miseria, poco roba, inconsciente*), whereas in English there are scarcely any typos at all. English, it seems, is ultimately all that matters, while Italian is way down on the list of priorities.

## 9. Direct discourse and target-language dominance. Is this a translational question?

According to Clark and Gerrig (1990: 798-799), "narrators rarely intend us to be able to reconstruct the originals verbatim. No matter how we view translated quotations, it is sheer philosophical imperialism to rule them out as unacceptable or incorrect reports".

Whether it is legitimate to speak of translated quotations in the current context is a moot point. It could be argued that the issues discussed in this article do not fall within the remit of translation at all, since quotations in English of what was originally Italian dialogue might be more accurately construed as reconstructions rather than translations. Nevertheless, it is hard to dispute the idea that some sort of conversion from Language A to Language B is taking place, and for this reason it may be of benefit to turn to Translation Studies for assistance.

The most obvious insight from TS is that of target-language orientation, whereby the smooth flow of the target language is paramount, prevailing over the mechanisms and dynamics of the source language. In House's terms (1977),

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translations of this nature are covert, i.e., a filter has been applied, assigning to them the status of an original source text in the target language. As Hatim (2009: 42) puts it:

Covert translation is a mode of text transfer in which the translator seeks to produce a target text that is as immediately relevant for the target reader as the source text is for the source language addressee. Functional equivalence is the goal, and anything which betrays the origin of the translated text is carefully concealed.

It does not seem unreasonable to apply the notion of target orientation to the books analysed in this paper. Even if we are not dealing with translation *stricto sensu*, and even though there is no specific target culture, there is however a target language – in this case English – inasmuch as English is the narrative’s vehicle of communication and thus the language that the target readership will engage with. The approach in these works is such that, as the narrative progresses, the reader loses sight of the fact that most of these writers arrive in Italy with barely any Italian at all, and their efforts to learn Italian are all but eliminated in the name of a smooth narrative flow. In Venuti’s (1995) terms, there is a domestication of the foreign scenario which hampers engagement with cultural difference because that scenario is “pressed into homely moulds” (Hermans 2009: 98). Notwithstanding sporadic references to moments of incomprehension, the conspicuously target orientation of these works means that Annie in *Extra Virgin* understands the local parlance rather too easily for a beginner, Chris in *Head over Heel* and Hugh in the second part of *Crossing the Cultural Divide* come across as too self-assured in Italian, Veronica in *The Dangerously Truthful Diary* picks up technical jargon with alarming speed, Tim in *Italian Neighbours* has barely any language-related difficulties at all, and Gerry in *Cooking with Fernet Branca* makes mincemeat of his Italian interlocutor in Italian. We are light years away from the ego-battering, confidence-rocking expat experience – see Section 5 above – described by Wright in *An Italian Home*.

## 10. Conclusions

It goes without saying that in their writings authors are free to include or omit whatever they wish, but since almost all the books examined here are presented as autobiographical, with the author and the first-person narrator sharing the same name, one is entitled to assume that these are works of non-fiction, and that the respective authors’ intention is to provide a true and complete account of their experience of living in Italy. Now while there is no reason to believe that what we read is not true, there may be reason to believe that what we read is not complete. Some authors leave the reader with the impression that learning a

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language from scratch is not a significant obstacle when taking up residence in a foreign land, and most authors omit altogether the recurrent issue of how Italians react to foreigners, particularly to foreigners who are mangling their native tongue, and the psychological repercussions that their reactions can provoke. The way and the extent to which inverted commas are adopted is a big factor here, steamrolling over the subtleties of communication between speakers of different languages and creating a linguistic fog, with the reader frequently unaware of which is the original language of the dialogue.

There are perhaps two main reasons for this linguistic fog. The first is that most of the authors considered put pen to paper a long time after they first settled in Italy, with the result that, having gradually become proficient in Italian, they have simply forgotten what it was really like to be a hapless, language-strapped outsider. Not that such issues ever disappear altogether when one lives abroad: a foreigner in Italy will always be a foreigner in Italy (a former colleague of mine from London returned to the UK after twenty years of living in Verona, and when I asked him if he had grown weary of Italy, he replied not at all, he had simply grown weary of being a foreigner), regardless of acquired nationality, but I know from experience that one's memories of early language-related complications gradually fade.

The second reason connects with marketing: despite occasional exceptions, writers want their work to be read, to be enjoyed, and to be successful. However much expatriate writers purport to produce frank, unvarnished and uncut accounts of their life in Italy, the moment they begin to discuss their difficulties in a language with which the target reader is not familiar, and the moment they begin to describe the subtle and sometimes strained feelings that arise between natives and foreigners as a result of those difficulties, is the moment that they will conflict with the expectations and desires of their readers, most of whom have bought into the rhapsody of the Italian dream and crave more of the same.

All this falls within the mighty task of representing polylingual discourse within a monolingual medium. Of the strategies suggested by Sternberg (1981), the homogenising convention – the favoured strategy in the expatriate works examined – is the most target language oriented, but despite its popularity it is a technique which entails the building of an invisible language barrier, detaching the reader from the real dynamics of events unfolding on the other side of the great language divide.

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## On the direction of Translation Studies

*Susan Bassnett and Anthony Pym in dialogue*

*[Enter Anthony]*

I imagine I'm at one of those interminably repetitive translation conferences where the talk is all about the threat of global English and how much the world needs translations – since we all love languages, we all want more of them, more work on them, thus more translations. I am drifting to the back, a little forlorn, silently hiding disheveled and perplexed dissent, when I spy Susan, who has just come in. Time for a quiet word or two, with someone who really cares about translation (more than I do) and who especially cares about literature (again, more than I), someone whose opinion is always worth having, along with a little gossip. So I look around for the biggest available glasses of acceptable wine, offer her one, and whisper in mock horror, “Susan, they're all crazy! Translation can't save the world... How can they all be so sure? These guys are living in denial, aren't they?”

By which I mean, I guess, that conceptual monsters are produced when you just look at *lingua franca* and translations, black and white, as if they were somehow bad vs. good, unrelated and exclusive of all other communication solutions. By which I refer to denial of the many ways that solutions *other* than translation can solve interlingual communication problems. I speak from my occasional attempts to look at things other than translation, especially recently. (True, I only get invited to translation conferences, thus finding myself boxed in by age, yet I have been working with language-policy people in recent years, who similarly seem to be living in denial of English as a *lingua franca*, so I am boxed in even further.) “Susan, can you help me get out of here, please? Beam me up...”

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Susan finished her first glass of wine and held it out for a refill. “I too am sick of translation conferences where everybody says the same thing and they all talk to one another in their own arcane language,” she said, adding that with hindsight, she wishes she had not preached the gospel of translation quite as assiduously, in the years when she was trying to build Translation Studies. The field has become a sort of monstrous thing, like the man-eating plant in *Little Shop of Horrors*, but has had little impact anywhere outside its own domain.

Part of the problem, she continued, is that Translation Studies has grown exponentially around world, and in the UK this has been as a way of repackaging language teaching under a trendy new catch-all title. What we have today are hundreds of programmes called Translation Studies but no two are the same and the term covers a multitude of different interpretations of what Translation Studies means. In some cases, the programmes are more oriented to practice, hence effectively translator training, while in other cases they are abstract and mainly focus on literary translation and literary history. Then there are the technology programmes, where everybody is doing something with eye-tracking and petitioning for expensive equipment from impoverished universities who are spending all their cash on self-promotion.

What is clear though is that the socio-political and economic changes of the last three decades have led to an increased awareness of translation, or rather of the gaps that occur in communication without translation. We can send messages across the world in seconds but, as Michael Cronin (2017) points out, if those messages are not translated into a language that the recipients can understand, then the sending is pointless. But quite how we teach translation and to whom is not clear to me at all, despite the proliferation of programmes.

What I would like to see is translation being taught in programmes across the board, integrated into studies of all kinds, including Medicine, Law, Business, the sciences, and not just within the Humanities or as an add-on to foreign language learning. And I would like to see people who consider themselves Translation Studies experts explaining to the rest of the world exactly what they think their subject is.

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Anthony looked out the window and pondered silently: Will we wear our trousers rolled? Each generation complains about the next, of begetting monsters. No, we are not out of action yet, surely? Still work to be done!

The monster of the corporate university, indeed: they take the money of international students, promising to make them translators and interpreters, and simply not delivering. Ester Torres and Anthony had crunched some numbers from the programs in the European Masters in Translation (EMT), showing that in the UK the percentage of obligatory language-pair translation courses is regularly below 20 percent – the rest is for theory, research, and translation “in general”, with all languages in the same classroom to make more money. The EMT seemed suitably outraged by analysis, which they saw as some kind of treason to the cause, but how many of them would like to be translated by graduates of those programs?

That's what Anthony was thinking, but he didn't say it out loud. You see, he too was now caught up in the same game, developing a course called "Language Translation" (to distinguish it from the medical kind) to be offered to any undergraduate interested, no matter what the language. Yes, the idea is to give people ideas about what translation is, how fascinating it can be, and particularly how to work with online translation technologies (since they're all doing it anyway), and to take those things well beyond any discipline called Translation Studies. Anthony used to make fun of such courses, which he saw as a sad indication of how bad Americans were at languages. Didn't Venuti (1998: 105) propose that Comparative Literature students study translation theory instead of trying to learn a second foreign language? Anyway, now even Anthony is trying to explain translation beyond the coteries of Translation Studies. Anything is better than ignorance.

Which brings up images of the North American Comparative Literature machine, with subsidiary branches elsewhere. Anthony silently recalled some creepy Chinese Professor of English and Comparative Literature, apparent best mate of any big name in the game, saying: "Translation theory is very weak, and this is why the rightful home of translation is Comparative Literature, where theory is strong." Hello? Or Emily Apter, bravely writing off European translation studies as merely being concerned with "accuracy". Whatever. And now Edwin Gentzler has "post-Translation Studies", which looks a whole lot like (good) Comparative Literature.

Susan, he whispered with yet another look of perplexity, years ago you proposed that Comparative Literature was a subsidiary of Translation Studies, didn't you? Was it merely to provoke? In any case, it seems not to have worked. Some of these people are just saying whatever they like, about whatever they like, since translation is everywhere and they know about everything, apparently, so they use the word "translation" to mean all things. Here is Apter: "Cast as an act of love, and as an act of disruption, translation becomes a means of repositioning the subject in the world and in history" (2006: 6). Sounds really cool. But language learning also does that, doesn't it? As do a whole lot of other things. Or Sakai, who is an intelligent thinker dealing with important problems: "This occasion of making sense out of nonsense, of doing something socially – acting toward foreigners, soliciting their response, seeking their confirmation, and so forth – is generally called translation" (2010: 32). Really? It might also be called language learning, intercomprehension, use of pidgin or creole, translanguaging, and a lot more. Surely, Susan, to get back to my first point, surely we are losing the common object we were talking about?

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Indeed, Susan did say that Translation Studies ought to be the broad umbrella under which Comp. Lit could sit (1993: 161), but that was back in the 1990s and was a deliberate attempt to a) provoke the then moribund field of Comp. Lit. and b) to encourage the still marginal field of Translation Studies. What has happened since then is that Comp. Lit. has revived, largely through appropriating ideas from Translation Studies about the ways in which texts circulate and the various agencies involved in that process. With hindsight, Andre Lefevere's (oddly titled) book *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* which came out in 1992 contained all kinds of suggestions that Comp. Lit. has taken up, including rethinking the importance of economic factors in the movement of texts, recognising the role played by anthologies, editing, criticism and reviews, all seen as forms of 'rewriting' along with translation. The re-publication of that book in 2017, with a preparatory essay by Scott Williams, shows just how prescient Lefevere's ideas were. However, the debt Comp. Lit. owes to Lefevere and other scholars who worked across the board in literary, linguistic and historical studies is rarely if ever acknowledged.

What I see today is a widening gap between what is termed 'Comp. Lit' and what is termed 'Translation Studies'. Somewhere in the gap is the whole vexed issue of language which has never been resolved. Once upon a time, you had to be competent in three or more languages to be admitted onto postgraduate programmes in Comp. Lit, but that has long since ceased to be the case. I increasingly encounter postgraduate students not only of Comp. Lit but also of Translation Studies who have minimal acquaintance with any language other than their own, and the result is poor quality essays and feeble translations. Yet who is going to push for linguistic competence if that means turning away fatted calves who will swell the universities' coffers with the high fees they pay?

I don't see how we can separate the problems of Translation Studies as a so-called discipline from the pressures of the new corporate university systems, because they are connected. The proliferation of programmes defined as Translation Studies is surely connected to the need to bring in more and more students, regardless of linguistic qualifications.

So what might be done?

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What needs to be done? – Anthony's favorite Leninist title! This time he replied far too presumptively:

I'm not trying to pit one discipline against another, Susan. At the end of the day, it's all knowledge. And I know these things look like monsters only because

we can't control them, when we perhaps once vainly thought we could or should control them. But the few things I have tried to do all have their downsides.

For example, I have argued against the anti-empiricism of Baker and Venuti. I was just trying to say that we can't pretend to know everything from the outset; we need discovery procedures; translation exceeds its theories. But of course, as soon as I say that, I get put on the wrong side of history; I am associated with the descriptivist project that was innovative in its day but has now become a rather puerile positivism.

In the same way, as mentioned, Ester Torres and I have tried to show what is happening in all those one-year Masters degrees, with the best numbers we could find, but we are then accused of not understanding contemporary pedagogy, of being traitors to the cause, along with darker mumblings.

Or again, I wrote a book on translation solution types that is actually a history of twentieth-century linguistic Translation Studies. I tried to show that the discipline has a dynamic past, that the linguistic categories have been highly political, that there is more at stake than binary categories, and that there were flows of ideas connecting the Soviet Union, China and Central Europe prior to the kind of studies we found from the 1970s in English, French and German. But in pointing to that history of reasonably intelligent thought, all of which is nowadays dismissed as merely "linguistic" or perhaps "pre-activist", I am very aware that I cannot compete with exciting critical theory that now sees everything as culture and has all the answers always already.

What else can I do? Better, what could I do alongside like-minded souls?

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Anthony, isn't it interesting that I asked 'what MIGHT be done' and you ask what NEEDS to be done? I am more hesitant than you seem to be, but that is probably because we are coming at the problem from different angles. I have been more involved with literary translation, and then more recently with news translation, so for me both stylistic and cultural questions are always going to be significant, whereas you have been more involved with working in the wider world, and with training translators to engage with that world. But regardless of starting points, we both seem to share a concern about the state of Translation Studies as a field, about its inability to move forward and its failure to have much impact on other disciplines. And we both share concern about the way in which learning another language is declining in importance, at least in the English-speaking world.

We also share concern about the way in which translation as a concept has been hijacked by literary and cultural theorists. Remember when Salman Rushdie announced that ‘we are all translated men’, when he was referring not to language but to migration? Harish Trivedi then fulminated about that kind of thinking, pointing out that back in multilingual India people were getting on with the business of translation conducted across languages and were not engaging in the abstractions that appeal to intellectuals in the comfort of their English-speaking salons. But the idea of translation as a loosely conceived metaphorical concept has spread, to the detriment of attention being paid to what actually happens when you take a text in one language and try to put it into another.

In answer to a question you posed, yes, I think we have missed an opportunity to form an intellectual group that would be concerned with promoting translation as a creative act, one which always involves language and is also political, but which above all is a process of discovery. We learn through translating- we learn about our own language as well as about the language from which we are translating. We learn what cannot be said, what is unsayable, and we also learn about compromise, manipulation, negotiation. I go so far as to believe that it ought to be possible - indeed essential - to teach translation to people who have no foreign language, because in a way everyone engages in intralingual and intersemiotic translation, to go back to good old Jakobson, even if they don’t have a foreign language. I think this is what Genzler is trying to say through his post-translation studies stuff.

We seem to have found ourselves in a twenty-first-century version of the old language-versus-literature debates, which always ended with the literature people proclaiming their superiority and the language people scurrying round becoming ever more text-focussed. Only this time, what we have is Comp. Lit and World Lit grandly laying claim to translation as a metaphor for the movement of texts across cultures, and so ignoring anything sensible coming from Translation Studies people and continuing to think of translation as involving a notion of accuracy. Meanwhile, TS people import ideas from all over the place but don’t seem concerned with exporting anything, but more concerned with talking to themselves and building up their reputations as ‘translation scholars’.

Which brings me right round to where we started this discussion, with the dismal prospect of having to listen to yet more third rate papers at translation conferences.

\* \* \*

A week or so then passed until, as if tumbling out of a time machine, Anthony read the place and date (Ottawa, November 11 2017) and found himself

facing yet another translation conference. The title this time is “Translation and Minority”, which seems to mean several hundred things. Anthony is invited to say a few words to close the show. Oh dear. He reads the beginning of the dialogue you are reading now, down to the “beam me up” plea. Then he asks the audience, not entirely rhetorically, why he is there, yet again.

A hundred or so smiling faces are quickly saying why. They are mostly graduate students, young, enthusiastic, from all over: Syria, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, China, Spain, the United States, France, and so on, with just a few from Canada (Canada is not very Canadian), and a similar mix among the older faces. They have been talking for two days about a vast array of closely felt problems: poetry from the ruins of Syria, moribund languages in Taiwan, translation in the history of Romani, culture planning in Turkish journals, languages on the Mexican border, hegemonies with Translation Studies, bilingual Arabic authors, activism, resistance, democracy in several flavors, some literature, a bit of linguistics, but more generally the problems of people with languages and politics. The graduate students have been well selected, producing an intellectual mix that is far from Western, is universally engaged, and is immediately engaging. Somehow all these beautiful young people are using snippets of Translation Studies to think about their problems, to discuss them together, to seek solutions, to produce knowledge. And the language of the discipline, whatever its many faults, at least helps us talk about the most harrowing of horrors without weeping in public.

Is that good Translation Studies? Is it headed in any clear direction? Those are perhaps the wrong questions, calqued on a supposition of control, as if we could direct the show. There is a younger generation there; they are working on problems close to their experience; if we can help them at all, then long may it continue.

*[Exit Anthony]*

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