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**Step 1 draft**

Title: Explicitness strategies used in ELF interactions between proficient and emergent speakers of English

**Introduction: Connecting proficient and emergent speakers of English**

A note on terminology

In this study, the labels “proficient speaker” and “emergent speaker” replace the labels “native” and “non-native,” which do not capture the complexity and diversity in the use of English in times of increased mobility and contact between people from different backgrounds (Blommaert and Rampton, 2011; Cook, 1999).

* The term “proficient speakers” will designate both native and near-native speakers; a non-native speaker is a student (in this case) who has received at least five years of schooling in the US before college.
* The term “emergent speakers” will designate a wide range of individuals who have learned English as a second (third, fourth, etc.) language. Typically, emergent speakers, college students, in this case, use English as a lingua franca (ELF), rather than varieties of native English.

ELF can be defined as “any use of English among speakers of different languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option” (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 7)

Problem: Conceptualization of English and students’ roles in virtual exchange projects

Virtual exchange projects (O’Dowd, 2018; Mousten, Vandepitte, Arnó, Maylath, 2018) are becoming more and more popular in the long aftermath of the Covid pandemic. These projects link college courses in different countries. English language teachers are particularly keen to pair up English learners with proficient speakers living in the US, Canada, the UK, or (more rarely) Australia.

The goal of these teachers is to help their students develop their communication skills through experiential learning. In this approach students living in English-speaking countries are often presented as the “language experts” whereas emergent speakers from all the other countries are simply “learners” who need exposure to native English. There are two main problems with this approach:

First it assumes that native Englishes are stable and discrete codes that will facilitate mutual understanding in most types of cross-cultural interactions. The ideologies of monolingualism and native-speakerism present language as fixed, self-standing, and ‘immune’ from the influence of cultural, political, and economic forces that shape our communicative behaviors (Canagarajah, 2007; Cook, 1999, Holliday, 2006; Jenkins, 2006, 2007; Kim, 2011; Kramsch, 1997; Pavlenko, 2003; Pennycook, 2007; Rampton, 1990). These ideologies make us see linguistic difference as “a defining problem for and a characteristic of the socially different” (Lu & Horner, 2013, p. 583). Strangers and cultural Others tend to be defined by what they lack, native-like linguistic fluency, while their ability to speak several languages and use ELF often go unnoticed.

Second, intercultural communication is not a one-way road in which emergent speakers have to meet proficient speakers in their linguistic comfort zone. Accommodation cannot proceed only in one direction creating a situation in which emergent speakers are required to imitate native English. Proficient speakers also need to accommodate emergent speakers.

From this perspective, it is reasonable to argue that many (most?) proficient speakers often lack the accommodation skills that emergent speakers develop through sustained practice. Emergent speakers who frequently use ELF as a contact language to interact with individuals from diverse backgrounds are generally aware that they cannot depend on shared lingua-cultural conventions. For this reason, they gradually develop an ability to monitor and adjust their speech (and their writing too) to accommodate their interlocutors. In contrast, proficient speakers who have had few opportunities to communicate with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds often need formal training to understand intercultural communication as an act of linguistic and cultural mediation.

Gap in research and overarching goal of my research

Put is simply: Many proficient speakers are not prepared for intercultural communication. This problem is frequently forgotten as English instructors continue to native and near-native speakers as “language experts” without considering the contexts of communication and the participants in the interactions. Even ELF research has a tendency to focus on interactions between emergent speakers. Many available corpora of ELF contain conversations, lectures, discussions and other types of spoken interactions that involve primarily, if not exclusively, emergent speakers. What about proficient speakers? It is very important to collect audio or video-files of their own interactions with emergent speakers to understand how they perform; what they do well, and where they struggle. And if they do have problems with accommodation, why do they struggle?

The overarching goal of my research is to understand how a wide range of English teachers in English-speaking countries -- including Composition teachers in the US -- can help proficient speakers become better communicators in situations of cultural contact. Are these speakers really “proficient” when they need to interact with emergent speakers? Perhaps it is time to question this assumption.

**Theoretical framework**

To communicate effectively, all users of English need to develop intercultural sensitivity and a willingness to adjust their communication strategies and, if necessary, bend linguistic conventions to accommodate others. As Helm (2013) observes, language education should be concerned not only with instrumental aims but also humanistic ones and should promote intercultural dialogue and understanding.

My research on communication strategies used in ELF is connected to research conducted within the paradigms of translingualism and English as a lingua franca (ELF)

Translingualism

Two basic tenets of the translingual approach are particularly relevant for this study: First, Horner, NeCamp, and Donahue (2011) interrogate the myth of native-like fluency and advocate for the competing paradigm of translingual and transcultural competence. They argue that focus should be on mutual intelligibility rather than fluency because different contexts of interaction will call for a strategic (rather than norm-based) use of linguistic resources (2011, p. 287).

Translingual scholars describe all language use as an act of translation inter and intra languages (Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur, 2011; Horner, NeCamp, and Donahue, 2011; Lu and Horner, 2016). The word “translation” evokes the key concepts of negotiation and accommodation, which characterize ethical communication practices in global lingua francas.

If our goal of cosmopolitan citizens is to invite the ‘stranger’ into our world, we need to rediscover the value of negotiation and cultural mediation. In a position paper published in 1998, Olson defines postmodern ethics as “the encounter with the Other'' (p. 46). Our interactions with strangers, Olson adds, are often characterized by asymmetries of power and culture between individuals. How we negotiate our encounter with the Other, he concludes, is a weighty responsibility, and precisely what ethics is about.

ELF research

The language of intercultural exchange is not native English: Emergent speakers use ELF both in spoken and written interactions. ELF is hard to describe because of its fluid and context-dependent nature (Canagarajah, 2007, 2013; Pennycook, 2007; Jenkins, Cogo, & Dewey, 2011; Matsuda & Friedrich, 2011; Hülmbauer & Seidlhofer, 2013; Jenkins, 2015; Kimura & Canagarajah, 2018). However, studies on pragmatic aspects of ELF have shown that emergent speakers can effectively use a wide range of communicative strategies to negotiate meaning and achieve mutual understanding. These strategies include explanation, repetition, self-rephrasing, the joint construction of utterances, codeswitching, backchannelling, and many others. The high rate of success of interactions between emergent speakers is due to attitudes of patience, flexibility, and tolerance developed through frequent contact with people from diverse cultures.

An important pragmatic strategy was identified by Firth (1996) who named it the *let-it-pass strategy*. This strategy is used in ELF interactions when the listener is faced with a  
problem of comprehension but decides to let the unclear word or phrase pass to maintain the  
conversation “on the assumption that it will either become clear or redundant as talk progresses” (p. 243). The debate on the use of this strategy in ELF interactions is open and extremely interesting. Scholars are trying to understand whether using this strategy has a negative impact on comprehension. If, on the one hand, speakers who move on even when confused help to maintain the flow of the conversation, in professional contexts mutual understanding and clarity are more important than saving face (of the interlocutor) or protecting the flow of the conversation.

Importantly, failure to adjust speech and/or failure to use pragmatic strategies typical of ELF in situations of intercultural contact results in a type of miscommunication that Seidlhofer terms *unilateral idiomaticity* (Seidlhofer, 2002, 2009). Unilateral idiomaticity occurs when a speaker uses an idiomatic expression that the interlocutor does not know. An example of this common type of miscommunication is reported by Seidlhofer (2009, p. 202). What follows is an exchange between a British BBC journalist and a Chinese lawyer:

Journalist: . . . but that makes it a criminal offense, *in my book*!

Lawyer: eh sorry?

Journalist: well don’t you think this is criminally wrong?

Lawyer: eh you mean if it was (secret)—yes

In this exchange, the inconsiderate use of the idiomatic expression “in my book” causes problems to the Chinese lawyer who is already challenged by having to explain complex ideas in his/her second (or third, fourth, etc.) language during a live TV show.

Following key findings in the study of ELF interactions, this study focuses on the use of a particular set of pragmatic strategies: Explicitness strategies, which include paraphrase, explanation, simplification, and other strategies use proactively to avoid misunderstanding (Kaur 2010, 2011; Mauranen, 2007).

**Virtual exchange projects that I have conducted in 2021**

Project 1

A group of seven emergent students enrolled in the Ecology of Global English, a course offered at Penn State Behrend, were paired up with seven students -- volunteers majoring in English -- at Piemonte Orientale University (Italy). Below is a summary of how the exchange was chronologically organized between the two classes at Behrend and Piemonte Orientale during a two-month period:

1. We prepared the participants for the exchange by introducing ELF research, and theories connected to translingualism and intercultural communication.
2. We organized them in pairs and groups, then asked each unit to schedule their Zoom meetings and reflect on topics for conversation.
3. We asked them to record their Zoom meetings so that they could listen to their interactions and reflect on their performances.
4. We asked them to write a report on their conversations with project-partners.

Of the seven students who participated in project 1, four agreed to share their Zoom conversations. Some of the conversation involved three or four students.

Project 2

A group of four students enrolled in first-year Composition, a course offered at Penn State Behrend, were paired up with three students -- volunteers majoring in English -- at Piemonte Orientale University. The project was organized similarly to project 1. All students involved in project 2 decided to share their conversations with me and the instructor in Italy.

Rethinking students’ role: Challenging assumptions

As we organized our telecollaboration project, we decided that we would do our best to avoid establishing unequal and asymmetrical relationships and diminish the power position of proficient speakers (Helm, Guth & Farrah, 2012). We did not position idiomatic American English as the language to be used in the exchanges and the reports produced by the students in Italy. We did not present the students in the US as the authoritative language experts whose main role was to coach or tutor the Italian students.

Following Helm, Guth, and Farrah’s invitation to avoid positioning emergent speakers solely as language learners (2012, p. 118), we emphasized their expertise as users of ELF because we agree with Canagarajh (2007) that speakers of ELF should never be reductively considered as incompetent. They can certainly develop their proficiency further, but this is also true for proficient speakers, who can always develop their speaking and writing skills, and certainly need to understand communication in ELF.

**Data collected**

The Behrend corpus of ELF conversations

All the students involved in two virtual exchange projects recorded their Zoom conversations so that they could analyze them and reflect on their performances. Most of the students decided to share the recorded audio-files of these conversations with me and the instructor in Italy after reading and signing consent forms.

The data for the present study consists of ten audio files for a total of 9 h 50 min of naturally occurring conversations that took place remotely (Zoom). These conversations and their transcriptions are collected in the ever-expanding Behrend corpus of ELF conversations. The corpus of the transcriptions of these conversations contains, in total, 78,510 words.

The project-partners for the two virtual exchange projects are:

* Group 1) eight students from Penn State Behrend. All of them are proficient speakers of English born and raised in the US. They will be designated with the abbreviations PS1 (Proficient speaker 1), PS2, PS3, PS4, PS5, PS6, PS7, PS8.
* Group 2) eight students from Piemonte Orientale University. All of them are emergent speakers of English and proficient speakers of Italian. Only one of them, ES1, a multilingual speaker, was not born and raised in Italy. These speakers will be designated with the abbreviations ES1 (Emergent speaker 1), ES2, ES3, ES4, ES5, ES6, ES7, ES8.

**Research question**

My research goal was to study the transcriptions of the audio-recordings to find and evaluate explicitness strategies like paraphrase, explanation, and simplification. My research question was: What difference can we see in the ways in which emergent and proficient speakers use explicitness strategies?

There aren’t many studies that focus specifically on how explicitness strategies are deployed in ELF interactions, especially by proficient speakers of English. ELF research tends to focus on emergent speakers of English, but it is equally important to assess and analyze how proficient speakers accommodate (or fail to accommodate) emergent speakers. My study addresses this gap in research.

**Methodology**

Speakers who can anticipate problems that their interlocutors might have understanding certain terms or cultural references preempt non-understanding or misunderstanding by using explicitness strategies. These include, primarily, paraphrase, explanation, and simplification, which are used before the interlocutor explicitly or implicitly asks for clarification.

The interactions examined are naturally occurring talks among proficient and emergent speakers of English.

Step one was to conduct a preliminary analysis of the audio files and obtain transcriptions of the talks. To obtain these transcriptions I used Otter.ai. This software extrapolates transcriptions from audio and video files and allows researchers to hear the original utterances while seeing the corresponding segments highlighted on the screen. My extensive analysis of the files and transcriptions allowed me to identify several CSs used by the participants.

Step two was to code the transcriptions. Together with the researcher at Piemonte Orientale University, we each coded the data separately, picking up instances of the use of explicitness strategies. Grammatical self-repairs — that is cases in which participants rephrased an utterance to correct what they perceived as a grammatical mistake — were not considered.

Explanations offered after the hearer asked a clarification question were not considered.

Following methods typical of conversation analysis (CA), explicitness strategies were identified by studying the surrounding discourse carefully and considering the previous and following turns.  Our unit of analysis are not individual utterances, but rather sequences of negotiation (Seedhouse, 2004). We focused on clusters of closely related turns. In CA, sequences and turns‐within‐sequences are the primary units of analysis (Heritage, 1984).

When we disagreed on the classification of a unit as an instance of explicitation, we negotiated a solution rather than just discard our finding. We also identified, coded, and discussed cases of “failed explicitation”, i.e., cases in which the use of explicitness strategies was necessary but did not occur.

Investigating ELF interactions from a conversation analytic perspective contributes to an improved general understanding of the linguistic and interactional resources deployed and required to conduct meaningful discursive practices (Firth, 1996).

**Results (in progress)**

Emergent speakers

Results show that emergent speakers use explicitness strategies more frequently and more consistently than proficient speakers do. They make more efforts to prevent non-understanding and misunderstanding through explanations and clariﬁcations. Overall, these findings are in agreement with the ﬁndings of previous ELF research (Mauranen, 2007; Kaur, 2010, 2011).

The examples below illustrate how resourceful and creative emergent speakers can be when using a range of different explicitness strategies

ES1

* So, the English people speak in New York, for example, is not going to be absolutely the same than the one they speak in Los Angeles, for example. *So, do you struggle with some accent? With some accents of English? Okay, that's a question*.
* When I started watching that movie, it was purely for entertainment purposes, *because I couldn't get anything. I couldn't get anything of what they were saying*.

ES2

* So when did you start? *I mean, like, were you like a little kid or this passion just grew when you were a teenager or something like that*?
* You are Americans, right? *Like 100% Americans, or…*

ES3

* Sanremo festival is like the X Factor final
* Here in Italy, *it’s like crime...well not a real crime, but like a fashion crime let’s say*, if you wear socks with open shoes
* Even the actor who played *Carlo, Charles, sorry*…

ES4

And then then there are groups of students that can have access to classes.

Uhm… like you have to… you have to reserve, you have to book, you have to book, uhm… *your class from an app, an app on your phone, your mobile phone and* …

ES5

and there were a lot of like German and Scottish students in *Tenerife, which is like very close to Morocco and Africa*.

ES6

So, for example, if you go in *Mailan, Melan, Meelano,* if you… do you know? OK, and maybe *you go for example in Bocconi or univ…in high high level university*, you have a test admission that is like an international test

ES7

Because my village has 13 people who live there.

ES8

So, *for example, we have languages, we have tourism, we have… classical studies, so like Latin, Greek*, stuff like this. And we have the scientific ones. *So, for example,* my brother studied in a chemistry high school.

These examples show how explicitness strategies can vary depending on communicative needs. ES1 offers clear information on the speech act he is using through a discourse marker (a question), and also resorts to repetition and clarification.

ES2 rephrases and explains what she means with resourceful creativity (“100% Americans”). She also gives her interlocutor very specific options almost to guide her response. By saying “were you like a little kid or this passion just grew when you were a teenager …” she simplifies her question, thus making it easy for the listener to provide an appropriate answer.

ES3 describes wearing socks with open shoes as a crime, but then realizes that she is exaggerating and perhaps confusing her American interlocutor, so she modifies and clarifies *crime* with *fashion* thus producing the creative (and rhetorically effective) expression *fashion crime*. ES3 is also quick to find an American TV show that can be compared to the Sanremo music festival.

ES4 wants to be sure that her interlocutor will understand her, so she tries to be as specific as possible when using the words *app* and *phone*. In other words, she resorts to repetition and redundancy to preempt non-understanding.

ES5 does not give for granted that her American interlocutor will know where Tenerife is, so she explains that Tenerife is very close to Morocco, then she adds a reference to Africa to make sure the listener understands where Morocco is. Of course, one can observe that ES5 could have added that Tenerife is an island to be even more explicit, but it cannot be denied that ES5 made a good effort to disambiguate her utterance considering the time constraints of a spoken conversation.

ES6 tries to be as clear as possible with the pronunciation of the Italian city of Milan; so, she tries with three different pronunciations, the third being the Italian pronunciation. This is clearly an attempt to be explicit, even if, perhaps, not very successful, in this case. Following the reference to Milan, ES6 mentions the Bocconi, a very prestigious and expensive (by Italian standards) Italian university, but not even for an instant does she assume that her conversation partner from the US will know what the Bocconi is; so, she promptly adds that Bocconi is *a high-level university.*

ES7 uses redundance as an explicitness strategy. She wants to make sure that her interlocutor will understand that she is talking about the population of the village where she was born. The phrasing of the utterance might sound awkward to a native speaker, but the fact that her message is clear and straightforward certainly allows the hearer to do less interpreting work.

ES8 makes her utterances more explicit and fights ambiguity by using examples, a strategy that all the emergent speakers used frequently. She also shows intercultural sensitivity when she clarifies that by *classical studies,* she meansLatin and Greek.

Proficient speakers

Proficient speakers seem to have a harder time understanding what kind of words or cultural references could cause comprehension problems to emergent speakers. This problem is due, albeit in part, to the fact that proficient speakers, especially the sub-group of native speakers, cannot recognize idioms. They are rarely aware that they are using an idiom (Verzella, 2020). For this reason, they fail to take proactive measures like rephrasing the idiom or explain its meaning.

Cases of failed explicitation occurred more frequently during proficient speakers turns. For example, when two US students (PS1 and PS2) presented themselves as “creative writing majors” they did not anticipate that their interlocutors would be confused by the words they used. The emergent speakers (ES2 and ES3) pretended to understand, thus relying on the *let-it-pass* strategy (Firth, 1996), but a minute later ES3 asked: “So you are taking a degree in what?” In her turn, ES2 asked: “So you will work in journalism?”

Some of the opaque idioms (emphasized in italics) used by the proficient speakers include

* You *hit on* something that is so important…
* I know you're not from the United States. That's the only thing I can *roll out*.
* Yet, you can ask whatever you want. Really, you don't have to *stick to it*
* It's, it's kind of like what *y'all* were saying?
* We *had a blast*
* After high school, science just has like *a bad taste in my mouth*
* You can get that *muscle car*. You can get that truck.
* There's like these like *mom-and-pop shops* in, in Pennsylvania

The last expression in the list was used by PS8, a very eloquent student who could not always identify words, expressions, or cultural references that required and explanation in the context of an ELF interaction. However, towards the end of his conversation with his project partner in Italy, he said: “A good amount of the time it will either be a chain restaurant or a *mom*… and like *a small business*.” PS8 was going to use *mom and pop shop* again, but then he realized that this expression might have caused problems to the listener. This is an example that shows how some of the proficient speakers appeared to learn by doing and gradually developed their conversation skills in ELF, an aspect that deserves further investigation.

Even if some proficient speakers did explain some of the idioms they used — when they could recognize these expressions as idioms, which is far from easy for native speakers of any language — most of the idioms that can be found in corpus were not explained. This is an example of the problem of unilateral idiomaticity discussed by Seidlhofer (2002, 2009).

One can assume that the emergent speakers might have understood some of these idioms, but the fact that they rarely asked for clarifications or explanations cannot be seen as evidence that emergent speakers did comprehend idioms. In fact, both the emergent and proficient speakers rarely asked for clarification, even when speakers made cultural references that the listeners could not possibly understand. This is a very clear pattern in the corpus. The corpus contains many utterances produced by the emergent speakers that even the author of this paper (born and raised in Italy and thus familiar with Italian culture) could not understand after listening and relistening to these utterances several times. And yet, the proficient speakers never asked for clarification. Only in a couple of cases, PS8 asked something like “What do you mean by X?” where X is a confusing word used by the interlocutor. One proficient speaker, PS4, also used non-standard sentence structure and convoluted phrasing that made many of her utterances very difficult to understand, but her project partner form Italy never asked for clarification.

These findings are in contrast with other researchers have observed in other corpora (Mauranen 2007, for example). Both the proficient and emergent speakers involved in these projects resorted to the let-it-pass strategy (Firth, 1996) even when this decision meant that they could not comprehend what the speakers were saying.

The use of abbreviations like Psych, instead of Psychology, or Chem, instead of Chemistry

might have caused further problems to the emergent speakers. In general, Italian speakers do not use abbreviations and acronyms as frequently as Americans do, so they are not prepared to quickly decode short words as abbreviations.

The proficient speakers’ use of references to American culture and lifestyle certainly frequently challenged the emergent speakers. For example, a proficient speaker mentioned Walmart in one of her utterances. In conversations about the US health care system, more than one proficient speaker used technical terms like “dependent” and “deductible” without explaining their meaning. Another speaker assumed that an Italian student would know what Advanced Placement means. She did spell out AP to help the listener, but she stopped at that. Similar problems were caused by the occasional use of acronyms like GPA and SAT (tests) by several speakers from the US. Spelling out these acronyms might have helped a bit, but a full explanation was also necessary. In all these cases, it is reasonable to assume that the students from Italy could not comprehend what their American peers were saying.

The proficient speakers had another speech habit that is likely to cause comprehension problems: Their use of pronouns (especially *it)* with unclear antecedents. In contrast, emergent speakers appeared to repeat nouns, rather than replacing them with pronouns.

An extended example:

ES1

OK, yeah. You said it. I wanted to ask you: how frequently do you use idioms? Is *it* part of your everyday conversations or… is *it* something that you only use in certain contexts? Yeah, that's a nice question.

PS2

I… I know I use *it* every day. Because we have so many of *them*.

IS1

yeah

PS2

And you you grow up learning them and you don't know where *they* came from, like for one of your videos about Don Quixote, about needle in the haystack. I didn't know that… so we, we grow up learning these expressions, but not necessarily where *they* come from. We just know what *they* mean. So, we use *them* a lot. I use *them* a lot.

PS1

Yeah, and I think an element of it too is I don't even think about *it*.

*It*'s just kind of like ingrained in my brain

Initially, ES1 and PS2’s use of the pronouns *it*, *they*,and *them* to replace the word *idioms* does not present problems even if the use of *it* for a plural form (*idioms*) is grammatically nonstandard. But then, in the last utterance, what word or idea is the pronoun *it* replacing? The antecedent becomes more ambiguous, more difficult to comprehend in the short span of time that separates speaking turns. Explicitness strategies must be used because listeners only have seconds to process and make sense of what they hear. Nobody likes to interrupt the flow of a conversation to mull over the meaning of a word or expression.

The proficient speakers did try to monitor their speech, but more in terms of rate of speech and enunciation. Being less exposed to ELF interactions, they still need to gain experience with the use of pragmatic strategies.

This does not mean that the US students never resorted to explicitness strategies; they did, but less frequently and less consistently compared to the emergent speakers. Importantly, their use of explicitness strategies does not show the range and the complexity that can be observed in the speech of the emergent speakers. The examples below offer a bird’s eye view of how proficient users of English used explicitness strategies:

PS1

* Would you say that...when you have to speak in Italian or or English that you kind of *lose a part of yourself*? Do you find that it's weird, to like, *step into another ES1*?

PS2

* No, I think, I think because of our *acting background… our theatre background*, we...

PS3

So like, *do you guys live in a dorm* 'cause like right now I am in my dorm room so you, like… *live on campus or do you like drive to campus*?

PS4

There's areas if you just drive in the United States, you can change *time zones. You can go back an hour or forward an hour.*

PS5

we were a *sanctuary city*, *which pretty much meant uhm, but it's kind of complicated, but if you were to get stopped by the cops or the cops were to ask you or anything, or question you, they couldn't ask about your immigration status*.

PS6

I had the second highest GPA in my class.  So, I had the second best grades in my class.  I had one of up in the 90th percentile for my standardized test scores. I did a ton of extracurricular activities, such as like volunteering and joining clubs and stuff like that,

PS7

Are you, are you living on campus? Like are you living at your university or do you travel back and forth from home?

Is your family very or like family-oriented so you're like close and like is family important, I guess for you?

PS8

Well, if you work at a bar, what, uh, the American thing is that if you work at like a bar or a restaurant, a good amount of the time it will either be a chain restaurant or a mom… and like a small business.

These examples provide evidence that every single proficient speaker used explicitness strategies even if, in most of the conversations, the emergent speakers used these strategies more frequently.

There is just one exception in the corpus. Specifically, in the conversation between PS6, PS7 and ES7. PS6, a first-year student at Penn State Behrend, born and raised in the US, was exceptionally adept at accommodating her interlocutor from Italy even if she revealed that, up to that moment, she had always lived in a small village and never travelled abroad. PS6 was the only student who preempted non-understanding by proactively explaining the meaning of the acronyms GPA (scores) and SAT (tests). She was also the most skilled of all participants at backchanneling to signal understanding and sympathize with her interlocutors. Her typical backchannel response was an emphatic and reassuring “for sure!”. However, PS6 was an outlier in the group of proficient speakers, especially in her drive to proactively explain references and disambiguate speech.

There is less of a range in the explicitness strategies used by the proficient speakers. They mostly used paraphrase or explanations. They rarely offered examples or comparisons. Clearly, it would be difficult for US students to offer comparisons considering that the vast majority of them do not know much about Italian culture. Thanks to information spread by old (music and films) and new media (especially YouTube channels and Netflix shows), Italians know much more about American culture.

In general, the proficient speakers appeared to be a bit less resourceful and creative in the use of language. One of them, PS8, basically used one strategy for explicitness: He conveyed complex ideas using direct speech for simplification. While this might be a rhetorical strategy aimed at adding emphasis, direct speech helped him to simplify his utterances and achieve more immediacy. It was a way to convey his message more directly. The entire corpus contains very few instances of this strategy.

The extract below shows how PS8 used direct speech:

It's kinda in a way evident on how fast-paced America is into getting people into the workforce 'cause you could easily point to the fact that…in high schools they have multiple branches of the US military coming in and being like

---hey, you seem you seem like you could be interested in the military.

IS8

Really?

ES8

Yeah, which is actually… This might be a bit of a shock, it's actually, uhm…Coming out as being a massive problem in the US where these individuals will blatantly target individuals with like lower GPA's, they will blatantly target them and be like

---hey, your GPA is very low but we'll pay you. Well do you want to come in and serve in the military for us?

And and that's a problem in almost every single community 'cause they will just come into high schools and be like,

---hey, your grades aren't that good. Would you like to serve in the Navy? And I guess in a way my grades were never at that level.

But I knew people who were, and it wasn't just through them showing up in high school. They would get like pamphlets in the mail, stuff like that and being like,

---oh, here's the positives of joining the military.

Conclusions

Clearly, when English is used as a global lingua franca, the question of proficiency becomes complicated and should be problematized. In these contexts of communication, the tables are turned, and it is proficient speakers who need systematic training to understand how certain features of native English can cause comprehension problems to ELF speakers. Proficient speakers also need to understand the pragmatics of ELF communication, the communication strategies that are commonly used in ELF interactions to fight ambiguity, establish common ground and achieve the goal of mutual understanding.

The majority of the Italian students (the emergent speakers of English) did not monitor their speech too much in terms of grammatical accuracy and did not try to sound like their American peers. They never asked to be corrected and rarely asked for help when they could not find the right word. And yet, they were constantly concerned of being misunderstood. They frequently and proactively used self-rephrasing and explanations to make their language and ideas more explicit and understandable.

The use of the let-it-pass strategy was clearly a problem in the set of interactions collected in this ELF corpus. The corpus contains many exchanges in which the speakers do not collaborate efficiently in the process of meaning making. There were many moments in which the lack of backchanneling or appropriate responses clearly revealed that the hearers did not understand what the speakers were trying to say but decided to just move on to different topics. This appears to be a troubling problem in interactions between native and non-native speakers, a problem that deserves further investigation.

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Step 2

**Institutional Description**

I completed my PhD at North Dakota State University, which is the main hub of the Trans-Atlantic and Pacific Project (TAPP). TAPP is a grassroots organization that promotes cross-cultural collaboration and virtual exchange projects. TAPP instructors present communication in English as an art of negotiation and mediation that requires accommodation skills. Writing and translation are presented as activities that greatly benefit from shared authorship and iterative cycles of feedback and revision. Recently, some TAPP members have started focusing more on spoken exchanges between proficient and emergent speakers of English to contribute to ELF (English as a lingua franca) research.

I now represent the EDGE program at Penn State Behrend, I have collaborated with many different universities overseas: Piemonte Orientale University, Molise University, Salento University, and Bolzano University (Italy); São Paulo State University (Brasil); AFM Krakow University (Poland); Kansai University (Japan); and the Polytechnic University of Catalonia (Spain). Through my project, hundreds of US students have had an opportunity to communicate and collaborate with emergent speakers of English from many different lingua-cultural backgrounds. Penn State has recently launched the EDGE program to promote virtual exchange and the study of English as a global lingua franca.

***Key Theorists*: Four main perspectives**

**Virtual exchange and telecollaboration**

“Virtual exchange” is an umbrella term that O’Dowd (2018) has recently proposed to use to designate a wide range of collaborative projects that link classes in different countries. The telecollaboration model is a structured type of collaboration usually based on the writing and editing of texts.

Scholars: Belz, J.A.; Dooly, M.; Flammia, M.; Godwin-Jones, R. Guth, S., Helm, F.; Mousten, B.; Maylath, B.; O’Dowd, R.; Rubin, J.; Stärke-Meyerring, D.; St.Amant, K.

**Translingualism**

Translingual scholars combat English-only ideology, native speaker ideology, and standard language ideology. They believe that all acts of communication involve some efforts to negotiate meaning-making and reconcile the conventional with the deviant across different languages, different modes, and different media. They also believe that educators should shift from pedagogies informed by monolinguist assumptions to pedagogies that emphasize linguistic flexibility and an understanding of difference in language as a resource for communicators.

Scholars: Bou Ayash, N.; Canagarajah, S.; Donahue, C; Holliday, A.; Horner, B.; Kramsch, C.; Lu, M-Z.; Matsuda, P.K.; NeCamp, S.; Royster, J., Trimbur, J.; Milroy, J.; Milroy S.; Olson, G. Pennycook, A.; Tardy, C.; You, X.

**English as a lingua franca (ELF) research**

ELF is any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option. While some linguists have tried to define ELF according to an identifiable phonological and grammatical system, others understand ELF as intersubjectively constructed in specific contexts of interaction.

Scholars generally converge on the idea that ELF is a language of secondary socialization that allows users to interact with individuals outside their primary social space and speech community. Studies on pragmatic aspects of ELF have consistently shown that non-native speakers can resourcefully develop many different strategies to negotiate meaning and achieve mutual understanding.

Scholars: Canagarajah, A. S.; Cogo, A; Cook, V.; Dewey; Holliday, A.; House, J; Jenkins, J.; Leech, G.; Mauranen, A.; Meierkord, C. ; Seidlhofer, B.

**The pragmatics of ELF and Explicitation strategies**

The work on ELF started with studies in pragmatics to understand how non-native speakers of English communicate with each other and resolve issues of non-understanding in ELF contexts.

Among the earliest of these pragmatic studies was Firth’s work in the 1990s. Firth found that ELF speakers use a number of strategies. The first of these is termed the Let-it-pass strategy, where speakers let an unclear word or utterance pass. Another is the Make-it-normal strategy, used when the hearer treats the speaker’s non-standard usage as normal. More recent studies confirmed that ELF speech is characterized by interactional and pragmatic competence. Participants wish to save face and support mutual understanding by using explicitation strategies like self-rephrasing, explanation, and paraphrase, co-construction of utterances, comprehension checks, backchanneling, supportive laughter, and several other cooperative strategies. There aren’t many studies that focus specifically on how explicitation strategies are deployed in ELF interactions, especially by proficient speakers of English. ELF research tends to focus on non-native and emergent speakers of English, but it is equally important to assess and analyze how proficient speakers accommodate (or fail to accommodate) emergent speakers. My study addresses this gap in research.

Scholars: Björkman, B.; Firth, A.; House, J.; Kaur, J.; Kennedy, S.; Kirkpatrick, A.; Mauranen, A.; Meierkord, C.

***Glossary:***

* Internationalization at home
* Virtual exchange
* Translingualism
* Intercultural sensitivity
* Native-speakerism
* Power imbalance
* English as a lingua franca
* Audience awareness
* Unilateral idiomaticity
* Pragmatics of ELF
* Let-it-pass principle
* Explicitation strategies
* Self-rephrasing
* Explanation