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**Interpreting versus English as a Lingua Franca  
(ELF). Future developments for conference  
interpreters in a globalizing world**

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## **1 Introduction**

In a globalized and globalizing world where communication settings diversify into different mediated and unmediated communication modes, including the use of English as a lingua franca (ELF), translation/interpretation, and multilingual practices, the impact on the interpreting profession is considerable. In this XX<sup>th</sup> FIT World Congress 2014 paper, I will summarize the findings of ELF-related interpreting research and detail the effects of the global spread of ELF on conference interpreters on the basis of findings from a 90,000 word corpus of in-depth interviews with 10 professional conference interpreters, a questionnaire survey among 32 professional conference interpreters, and a small-scale study of the interpretation of an interpreter trainee of three ELF speeches and retrospective interviews with the interpreter and the ELF speakers. Challenges arising from ELF developments will be sketched out with regard to the interpreters' working languages, processing, professional role and self-image, as well as entrepreneurial know-how.

## 2 Interpreter-oriented perspective of ELF

The global use of ELF is changing the working conditions and professional self-image of conference interpreters like no other development since the introduction of the technology for simultaneous interpretation after World War II. Interpreters are faced with a reversal of the “path from bilingualism to multilingualism” (Feldweg 1996: 89), that is, the path from bilingual consecutive meetings to multilingual simultaneous international conferences, which characterized the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and shaped the interpreters’ profession as we know it (cf. Feldweg 1996: 60, 89). They now witness the evolution from multilingual conferences back to bilingual “ELF conferences”, where communication takes place in non-native English and a maximum of one national language (if not in “English” only). They report that the challenges they face affect not only the macro-level of changing market and working conditions (e.g., professional standing, volume and kind of assignments, job satisfaction), but even more so that of the micro-level of processing (regarding comprehension and production processes and capacity management) (cf. Albl-Mikasa 2010).

There is as yet very little research-based support for the interpreters’ claims and reservations about ELF, because the implications of this major development for their profession have barely been taken into consideration in the newly established discipline of *ELF research*, which has made headway since the 1990s (cf. Jenkins/Cogo/Dewey 2011), and grown into a full-blown research discipline with the institutionalization of *ELF conferences* (Helsinki 2008, Southampton 2009, Vienna 2010, Hong Kong 2011, Istanbul 2012, Rome 2013, and Athens 2014); the establishment of the *de Gruyter Journal of English as a Lingua Franca* (JELF) and of the *ELF network* (ELF ReN), both in 2012; a number of *monographs* investigating the phonology of ELF (Jenkins 2000), attitudes and ideologies (Jenkins 2007), conceptual issues and general processes (Seidlhofer 2011); academic English (Mauranen 2012) and others; as well as a great number of research *papers and doctoral studies*.

In this context, the interface between translation and ELF has been taken up as an object of study only very recently (cf. Cook 2012, Mauranen 2012: 239-243). Up until then, ELF analysts predominantly pursued an emancipatory effort towards overcoming the deficit view of the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) paradigm, which holds that (non-native) English spoken by the majority of the world’s English speakers is merely an imperfect form of the native speaker gold standard. On the basis of corpora of spoken ELF data, this line of research has produced evidence of the effectiveness of ELF communication by means of non-native speakers’ creative appropriation of the linguistic means of expression for their communicative purposes (cf. Mauranen/Ranta 2009, Seidlhofer 2011, House 2012). The bottom line of ELF research is that “ELF is not a defective, but a fully functional means of communication, and that the arguments put forward against ELF come close to an appeal for an outdated prescriptive English native norm” (House 2013: 286).

A different approach has been taken by analysts in the context of *interpreting studies*: they were motivated by the interpreting practitioners’ pervasive complaints about the increasing number of non-native English speakers at conferences and the consequences for their work. In fact, professional interpreters speak of ELF or global or international English in rather pejorative terms, using terms such as BSE (‘Bad simple Eng-

lish'), Globish, or Desesperanto. After earlier studies on the effect of non-native speakers' accents on the interpreter's task (e.g., McAllister 2000, Cheung 2003, Kurz 2008) and the advantage of having the non-native speaker's first language as one of the interpreter's working languages (e.g., Kurz/Basel 2009), the wider impact of ELF on interpreting and interpreter-mediated communication has come to be investigated more recently. On the one hand, it has been shown that interpreter-mediated ELF communication can, in fact, be more effective. Thus, Reithofer (2010, 2013) finds that the understanding of source speeches in conference settings can be significantly higher among conference participants listening to the interpretation into their mother tongue than those listening to the non-native English original, even when they share the same technical background as the non-native speaker. On the other hand, it has become clear that the specific bilingual, interpreting-based conditions under which interpreters work (Albl-Mikasa 2013b: 195) make processing of ELF-specific discourse features clearly more difficult. In simultaneous interpreting, monologic, unidirectional speech processing does not allow for the co-constructive, interactional strategies of meaning negotiation in ELF encounters, which have been described as the basis of successful ELF communication (cf. Seidlhofer 2011). Even in dialogue interpreting, pragmatic moves like "let-it-pass", whereby unintelligible parts of an ELF utterance are ignored, are not a viable option for interpreters, who have to render all input completely and faithfully. Against this background a number of new challenges arise for the interpreter.

### 3 ELF-induced challenges for interpreters

Under the constraints of online processing against strict time and capacity limitations, interpreters are faced with altered (ELF-induced) conditions of source speech comprehension and target speech production. However, there is as yet far too little empirical research, so that the actual challenges involved can only be sketched out tentatively at this point.

#### 3.1 Languages challenges

An obvious challenge for the interpreters arises from accelerated language change due to the unprecedented global status of English. English, according to David Crystal (2003: 4-5), is used as a *mother tongue* in the USA, Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, several Caribbean countries, and a few other territories; as an *official or second language* in over seventy countries, such as Ghana, Nigeria, India, Singapore, and Vanuatu; and has priority in *foreign language* teaching in over 100 countries, such as China, Russia, Germany, Spain, Egypt, and Brazil. Due to extensive physical and electronic mobility, interpreters (with English as their working language) are no longer working with English, but with 'world Englishes' and English as a lingua franca and are increasingly confronted with a wide range of varieties and variations. These include different accents, structural and lexical variants due to linguistic transfer from the speakers' native tongue, a number of different proficiency levels and intercultural differences. It is obvious that interpreters find support in having a speaker's L1 as one of their working languages (cf. Kurz/Basel 2009 and the "shared languages benefit", Albl-Mikasa 2013a: 105). A major problem remains, however, namely that it is not possible for the interpreter to

prepare for all eventualities in the face of such diversity and variability. While the internet offers a range of resources to that end, interpreters can no longer rely on one of their fundamental skills: that of focused and targeted assignment preparation. Trained and geared towards Standard English (varieties), including predictable non-conformities, they are now in a situation where it is impossible to anticipate and adjust to the full potential range of L1-influenced linguistic structures and patterns (cf. Albl-Mikasa 2013b).

### 3.2 Processing challenges

It is this enormous variability characterizing ELF that poses a formidable challenge to the interpreter's processing. According to the above-mentioned questionnaire survey among 32 professional conference interpreters and interviews with 10 of them, it impacts the interpreters' comprehension process, because they have to grasp foreign accents, recover unconventional expressions, unravel unorthodox syntactic structures, and compensate for non-native English speakers' lack of pragmatic fluency (cf. Albl-Mikasa 2010). In fact, interpreters report that they often have to think outside the box and "think around the corner, or even two corners" to recover intended non-native speaker meaning in the source speech understanding process (cf. Albl-Mikasa 2010: 135-136, 2012b: 78). Moreover, they point out that inconclusive and unexpected source speech input may undermine interpreters' strategic processing, namely anticipation and the drawing of inferences, which are fundamental to their task. Instead of fast decision-taking on the basis of these strategies, extra resources have to be invested not only into the comprehension effort, but also into additional plausibility checks and a waiting tolerance for further clarification from the ongoing online input. Finally, a small-scale study suggests that activation and retrieval of target language items may be adversely affected and established automatisms no longer operational (Albl-Mikasa 2013b). In the course of his or her training and working experience, an interpreter builds up a kind of 'mental translation memory' with ready-to-hand translation equivalents, established transfer links, and settled-in translation routines. These more and less automatized source-to-target language connections depend on source input that matches the encoded items previously learned, rehearsed, stored, and repeatedly tried and tested. Unconventional, unfamiliar and unpredictable input fails to serve as a trigger or cue to prompt activation. Since, to a much greater degree than Standard English, "ELF is negotiated *ad hoc*, varying according to context, speaker constellation and communicative purpose [...] [and] is thus individually shaped by its users" (House 2013: 281), building up and making use of automatized transfer links is clearly affected.

These processing challenges may well be magnified in the near future, given that further diversification is under way. As Blommaert and Rampert (2011) described in some detail, globalization has amplified social, cultural and linguistic diversity worldwide, spurred by the emergence of new media and technologies of communication and information circulation. It brings together people "with very different backgrounds, resources and communicative scripts" and individuals with a "very variable (and often rather fragmentary) grasp of a plurality of differentially shared styles, registers and genres", thus making "identification of any initial common ground [...] a substantial task". Mixed language and multilingual practices, such as "translanguag-

ing” (whereby “speakers select language features and soft assemble their language practices in ways that fit their communicative needs”, García 2011: 7), are, thus, consequences of globalization that may further exacerbate the challenges for interpreters, when native English is no longer the standard as a conference language.

### 3.3 Professional role challenges

Another major challenge arises from a shift in interpreters’ professional roles and self-perceptions as professional communicators associated with the spread of ELF. Interpreters have had to accept a certain downgrading of their status and image from an indispensable supporter of international relations and cross-linguistic communication, admired for the complex cognitive skill of simultaneous interpreting, to provider of a service that is potentially replaceable by ELF. As one interpreter in the above-mentioned interview corpus put it: “Interpreting is something people are no longer prepared to pay for, whereas some time ago it was something that lent an international aura to their dealings” (I-2). As a result, interpreters are increasingly called upon to demonstrate the added value they can provide, which means that they need to constantly enhance performance and promote quality and professionalism (cf. Albl-Mikasa 2010). The problem is that any such attempt is foiled by an ever-increasing difficulty to deliver such high quality, since interpreting processes (reception, reformulation, and capacity management) are seriously affected in the comprehension, transfer, and production phase, as outlined above.

When it is no longer true that “perfect monolinguals want to communicate with other perfect monolinguals from different languages” (pointed out by Anna Mauranen in Albl-Mikasa 2012a: 271), interpreters have to adapt to the ‘imperfect multilingual’ as it were and meet “new demands requiring a broader repertoire of skills” (Mauranen 2012: 240). Interpreters in the questionnaire survey attest to making an effort in the production process to accommodate to the language skills and proficiency levels of non-native listeners, when these are known and when resources are not overtaxed by other task demands (Albl-Mikasa 2010: 138-139). Such audience design is part of the ongoing change in the interpreters’ professional role. Language professionals may indeed increasingly have to “fit the description of the good communicator of the future, a plurilingual, adaptive, effective speaker” (Mauranen 2012: 240) who is able to cater for the different linguistic and cultural competences of non-native target audiences. This may be easier for English-B interpreters who are themselves non-native speakers of English (which adds a new and interesting dimension to the debate about directionality).

This process of changing role and self-image has repercussions for a number of aspects the profession is identified with. In the interviews, the interpreters explicitly regret no longer being able to exploit their linguistic repertoires to the full. Their almost stereotypical infatuation with sophisticated linguistic expression and notorious language purist attitude (cf. Albl-Mikasa 2012a) have to give way to a professional attitude that displays an unprecedented degree of good will, tolerance, and even empathy as far as acceptance of all levels of linguistic proficiency and power of expression of non-native speakers is concerned. As one of the interviewed interpreters put it:

*It is part and parcel of doing a professional job to do one’s level best to interpret an incapable non-native English speaker and to make sure that the audience*

*doesn't get to suffer or notice if we do. As a professional, I have to be able to overcome my being annoyed and to compensate for insufficiencies, rather than to complain about them. It's not the non-native speaker's fault, after all. (I-7)*

It is perhaps not far-fetched to draw parallels with public service interpreting in that interpreters can be expected to become less of a neutral voice and more of a mediator, who compensates for source speech shortcomings and accommodates the (perceived needs) of a non-native audience, with members coming from the most varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Resulting implications for professional standards may have to be considered by associations such as AIIC (Association Internationale des Interprètes de Conférences, the global association of conference interpreters).

### 3.4 Entrepreneurial challenges

Against the backdrop outlined above, the professionalization of services and the development of business competence are key challenges for interpreters in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This was emphasized by Linda Fitchett, the President of AIIC, at the annual Geneva-based CIUTI Forum (Conférence Internationale Permanente d'Instituts Universitaires de Traducteurs et Interprètes) on January 17th, 2013:

*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' [...].<sup>61</sup>*

Interpreters, as expressed in the interview corpus, come to notice in the course of their business life that interpreting proper is only 50% of their job, while getting an assignment in the first place, dealing with the customer, and handling the job are all equally important (Albl-Mikasa 2012b: 61), especially under increasingly difficult market conditions. They can no longer afford a lax attitude with respect to a lack of business-related know-how or entrepreneurial understanding of what they are doing:

*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 interpreter in email exchange in German, my translation)*

For interpreters to succeed in providing “integrated, efficient and sustainable solutions to clients’ procurement challenges”, they “must better communicate with clients to tell them who we are, what we do, where to find us, and to help them to meet their needs.” (Linda Fitchett’s statement at CIUTI, see above).

For that, interpreters need to gain insights into the needs arising from diverse and diversifying multilingual contact situations and interchanging mediated and unmedi-

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<sup>61</sup> I would like to thank Linda Fitchett for making her manuscript available to me.

ated communication modes (i.e., ELF; interpreting/translation; multilingual practices; and receptive multilingualism, that is, “a mode of multilingual communication in which interactants employ a language and/or a language variety different from their partner’s and still understand each other without the help of any additional *lingua franca*”, Rehbein/ten Thije/Verschik 2011: 1). Such insights will have to be applied to the particular corporate-level communicative practices in organization(s) *in* or *for* which they come to work. It may no longer be sufficient to acquire the entrepreneurial and deontological skills required for their jobs (setting up their own small-scale freelance enterprises, developing assignment acquisition plans, advertising their services, formulating business letters and emails, writing invoices, etc.). When potential customers are no longer prepared to contract interpreter services at any cost, and when interpreter recruitment is outsourced to service suppliers whose criterion is low cost rather than quality, interpreters may have to work toward being more closely integrated in the broader organizational context in order to make the contribution their professional performance can make to effective multilingual communication visible and to raise awareness of the cost of poor quality dialogue. In order to market quality performance and justify and argue their case for good working conditions, the challenge is to move from communication expert to communicator in the broader sense of the term. Interpreters may be well advised to broaden their understanding of multilingual communication requirements and super-diversity in times of ELF and globalization in order to provide their customers with consultancy as to the communication modes appropriate in specific settings (e.g., when is interpretation a must to ensure effective communication and when can one make do with ELF or ad hoc multilingual practices).

All of the above-mentioned challenges facing the interpreter are subject to further empirical research into the relationship between ELF and interpreting.

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## Is Canada's new paralinguist occupation the answer to the translator shortage?

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### 1 Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine the emerging paralinguist occupation within the translation process in Canada and its potential impact on the translation profession. Following a description of this new occupation, the paper will examine a number of issues around the paralinguist concept, such as: How does paralinguist training differ from translator training? How will the introduction of paralinguists influence the technological and terminological aspects of the translation process? What is likely to be the impact of paralinguists on the professionalization of translation?

### 2 Why create a new occupation in the translation field?

#### 2.1 The translator shortage

For a number of years, translation services providers in Canada, including the Government of Canada's Translation Bureau, have been sounding the alarm about the impending shortage of translators. The most obvious cause is the retirement of the baby boomers who entered the translation industry en masse in the late sixties and