



New Perspectives on English as a European Lingua Franca

Heiko Motschenbacher



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Country codes

ALB	- Albania	FRA	- France	NED	- Netherlands
ARM	- Armenia	GEO	- Georgia	NOR	- Norway
AZE	- Azerbaijan	GER	- Germany	POL	- Poland
BEL	- Belgium	GRE	- Greece	POR	- Portugal
BLR	- Belarus	HUN	- Hungary	ROM	- Romania
BOS	- Bosnia Herzegovina	IRL	- Ireland	RUS	- Russia
BUL	- Bulgaria	ISL	- Iceland	SER	- Serbia
CRO	- Croatia	ITA	- Italy	SLK	- Slovakia
CYP	- Cyprus	LAT	- Latvia	SLO	- Slovenia
CZE	- Czech Republic	LIT	- Lithuania	SUI	- Switzerland
DAN	- Denmark	LUX	- Luxembourg	SWE	- Sweden
ESP	- Spain	MAC	- Macedonia	TUR	- Turkey
EST	- Estonia	MAL	- Malta	UK	- United Kingdom
FIN	- Finland	MOL	- Moldova	UKR	- Ukraine

Other abbreviations

AME	- American English	ESC-PC	- ESC Press Conferences Corpus
AUSE	- Australian English	ESL	- English as a Second Language
BNC	- British National Corpus	EU	- European Union
BRE	- British English	IRE	- Irish English
EBU	- European Broadcasting Union	LLC	- London-Lund Corpus
EFL	- English as a Foreign Language	NZE	- New Zealand English
ELF	- English as a Lingua Franca	SBC	- Santa Barbara Corpus
ELT	- English Language Teaching	VOICE	- Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English
ENL	- English as a Native Language		
ESC	- Eurovision Song Contest		

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Chapter 1

Introduction

It is generally accepted that the use of English has spread around the world. This spread is a result of two major strands of expansion. Historically, British colonisation efforts have led to English being transported from Britain to territories around the globe. A second, more contemporary motor to this spread is the growing use of English as a lingua franca in contexts where people of different linguacultural backgrounds meet and communicate. It is this latter development that has spawned a great deal of research on English as a lingua franca (henceforth ELF) as of lately. The current book seeks to make an innovative contribution to this enormously growing field, which is currently in the process of separating itself from more traditional approaches to the linguistic variation one finds under the umbrella term “English”.

At the moment of writing, ELF research shows two continental centres of gravity: Asia (cf. Baker 2009a; Cheng 2012; Kirkpatrick 2011; Murata & Jenkins eds. 2009) and Europe (cf. Berns 2009; Breiteneder 2009; House 2008a; Seidlhofer 2010). This is, of course, not surprising if one considers that English has played a prominent role as a lingua franca in both contexts. Still, it needs to be acknowledged that these two regional macro-contexts reflect (at least partly) different histories in relation to the use of English. While certain regions of Asia were part of the British Empire (Brunei, Hong Kong, India, Jordan, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri Lanka, to name but a few), mainland Europe has not been subject to the same colonial, Anglophone influences, with British colonial areas being restricted to small territories located at the geographical fringes of Europe (i.e. Cyprus, Gibraltar, Malta). Moreover, Europe is, historically speaking, widely considered to be the cradle of nationalism and therefore possesses a longer and more entrenched tradition of making “languages” central ingredients in nation building processes.

Even though this book does not provide a direct comparison between ELF in Asia and Europe, it is based on the premise that the way ELF manifests itself in Europe is not necessarily the same as in Asia or other parts of the world. This, in turn, means that the findings that are presented cannot be automatically transferred to other geographical areas, even though some aspects clearly do have a wider currency. In fact, it will be argued that even a generalisation of the findings that goes beyond the community of practice studied here is a difficult task that needs to be handled with due care. The use of the phrases *English as a European lingua franca* and *European ELF* in the present book should be understood accordingly: the subject matter is ELF as it manifests itself in transnational European contexts or, more locally, in a specific

community of practice of particular European significance, namely *Eurovision Song Contest* (ESC) press conferences.

It needs to be stressed from the start that the label *English as a European lingua franca* does not imply an internally stable and homogeneous entity. By contrast, this book sets out to explore European ELF as a hybrid, internally heterogeneous formation, even within one particular community of practice. To arrive at a comprehensive picture of this hybridity, European ELF is studied on various linguistic levels in the empirical sections of this book. Four levels will be discussed in detail: the code choice level (Chapter 4), the metalinguistic level (Chapter 5), the pragmatic level (in the shape of complimenting behaviour; Chapter 6), and the structural linguistic level (more specifically, relativisation; Chapter 7). These four levels are not analysed for their own sake but in relation to an ethnographic description of ESC press conferences as a usage context. This combination of perspectives is meant to yield a multidimensional, holistic picture of the hybridity of European ELF.

Beside the central goal of documenting the hybridity of European ELF on various levels, this study also has other (related) aims. In studying a community of practice of particular European significance, it also seeks to shed light on how “Europeanness” is performed via ELF as a medium of construction. It contributes to debates on how to conceptualise ELF (in Europe) and documents how ELF – as the epitome of linguistic practices in the postmodern age – clashes with some traditional and highly influential (socio)linguistic concepts that are based on notions of internal homogeneity and regional (often national) boundedness (such as *language*, *variety* or *speech community*).

ESC press conferences provide excellent data for the research purposes just outlined. This is not just the case because they represent a transnational, pan-European media context in which English is used as a lingua franca by default. Another interesting aspect is that they constitute a context in which “Europeanness” is a salient issue – a salience that has gained prominence throughout the history of the contest. The ESC is an annually televised media spectacle for which Europeans virtually get together to pick the “European song of the year”. At the moment of writing, the preparations of the 57th annual edition of the contest are in full speed, and its success as a (if not *the*) pan-European entertainment show is unprecedented. In the course of its history, the contest has turned into a European institution in its own right, and one that – in contrast to more directly political efforts to unite Europe – has been successful in uniting Europeans from across the continent in front of their TV sets. As it is today watched by about 110 million viewers Europe-wide,¹ the contest continues to be an

1. Viewing figures given by Schweiger and Brosius (2003:273) for the ESC 2002 bear witness to the high popularity of the contest in many participating countries, with market shares of 40.4% for DAN, 39.1% for SWE, 32.5% for ESP, roughly 50% in EST, 40.6% for SUI and 38.2% for GER. In GER, the ESC 2011 was awarded the *German Television Prize* in the category “Best Entertainment Show”.

important driving force for European integration and identity formation. Throughout its history, the competitive element of the contest has increasingly shifted to the background, which today makes the ESC an event that celebrates European togetherness through popular music. Each participating country pre-selects a pop music act that will then represent the respective nation by giving a musical performance on the Eurovision stage. The contest is televised live. While the winning performance was in earlier times decided through nation-based jury voting, the viewers across Europe have become actively involved in picking the winner by public televoting since 1998. Historically, the contest developed from a largely Western European phenomenon to a truly pan-European event in the 1990s, when more and more Eastern European countries joined the Eurovision family after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Today, the annual event stretches over three nights (two semi-finals and the grand final) and hosts approximately 40 participating national delegations. The press conferences that these national delegations gave during the preparatory phase of the 2010 edition of the contest are used in the present book as data for studying European ELF.

The use of English in contexts where speakers from various national cultures get into contact with each other is certainly not a new phenomenon. However, the greater visibility of such contacts, for example as an outcome of increasing “Europeanisation”, has recently caused many linguists to devote a great deal of their attention to such transnational uses of English. This has led to a greater institutional recognition of uses of English that widely depart from more traditional notions of nativeness and standard-orientation. A result of this development is that scholars’ reasoning about the status of English in Europe has taken on various shapes, ranging from more traditional to more innovative approaches. It is essential to be aware of these theoretical discussions before moving on to the empirical analyses of transnational uses of English in Europe later in this book. The four major perspectives on English in Europe will therefore be outlined in the four initial sections of the following chapter. Among these four positions, there are two traditional approaches that have lost ground as of recently and can therefore be described as largely historical phases in the treatment of English in Europe. This is the case for the linguistic imperialism approach to English in Europe (Chapter 2.1) and the Euro-English debate (Chapter 2.2). The two remaining strands, the English as a lingua franca approach (Chapter 2.3) and the postmodernist reconceptualisation of English (2.4) have become more prominent in recent years and accordingly play a major role in contemporary discussions of English in Europe. Chapter 2.5 motivates the title of the book in explaining which new perspectives on European ELF are to be presented.

Chapter 2

Differing views on the status of English in Europe

2.1 English in Europe and linguistic imperialism

When describing the status of English in contemporary Europe, it is essential to take note of the specificities of Europe as a multilingual macro-context. In contrast to the multilingualism found in other parts of the world, European multilingualism is heavily structured by national orientations to societal monolingualism that are only slowly giving way to alternative discourses. These orientations cause a hierarchisation of languages that generally sees those languages on top which are official national languages, whereas languages that do not fulfil this function are located at the bottom. Ammon (2006b), for example, conceptualises the constellation of languages in Europe in terms of the following hierarchy: 1. English and French as (*de facto*)¹ EU working languages, 2. the remaining 22 official EU languages (Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish and Swedish), 3. national languages of non-EU countries (e.g. Albanian, Bosnian, Icelandic, Montenegrin, Norwegian, Serbian), 4. regional languages with semi-official status in the EU (Basque, Catalan, Galician), 5. acknowledged minority languages (e.g. Scottish Gaelic in the UK, Sorbian in GER), 6. unacknowledged indigenous minority languages (e.g. Romani in many European countries), 7. exogenous minority languages (e.g. Hindi in the UK, Turkish in GER) (Ammon 2006b: 221–222).² The status of English at the top of the hierarchy is now unchallenged, as more and more interactions involving speakers from various European linguacultural backgrounds are carried out in English as a *lingua franca*.

Such traditional descriptions of European multilingualism are centrally based on the notion that European nation states compete for the wider recognition and transnational use of their national languages. Moreover, they are influenced by discussions of linguistic human rights in relation to the spread of English in Europe

1. Officially all EU languages are called “working languages” (Ammon 2006a: 321).

2. Ammon (2006b: 222) also includes varieties of debated language status (e.g. Scots) and dialects further down in the hierarchy.

(see Phillipson 1998; Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas 1997). The latter approach considers speakers' need to communicate in their L1 as a fundamental human right in need of protection. Such reasoning has proven useful for the recognition of linguistic minorities both on the national and on the European level. However, in transnational European communication, where the use of English as a lingua franca has been gaining ground, an application of linguistic human rights seems much less straightforward. When speakers from various linguacultural backgrounds meet, an insistence on the linguistic human right to use one's L1 turns out a significant obstacle to transnational communication. Trying to establish one's own L1 as a means of transnational communication runs counter to the cooperation-oriented principle of accommodation. It may furthermore be interpreted as an undesirable highlighting of one's national affiliation that carries less prestige and is communicatively less efficient in transnational contexts. In fact, it can be argued that the linguistic human rights discussion shows a tendency to foster nationalist thinking in relation to language and therefore constitutes a serious obstacle to any deeper levels of Europeanisation. The promotion of European multilingualism through foreign language education is unlikely to reduce the problem of these language disputes, because, in practice, people can learn only a small number of (European) languages, meaning that a large number of national languages cannot be covered (let alone the languages that do not enjoy national status).

Supporters of the linguistic human rights approach take issue with the continuing spread of English in transnational communication, which they perceive as a threat to multilingualism and, therefore, as a process of cultural homogenisation as an outcome of British and/or US American linguistic imperialism (the homogeny position; Phillipson 2003a/b; Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas 1997; Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson 2003). The most ardent representative of this school of thought is Phillipson, whose work has more recently become highly polemic. For example, he describes English as a killer language that endangers all other languages, calling it "lingua frankensteinia" instead of lingua franca (Phillipson 2008a/b). For Europe more specifically, linguistic human rights scholars suggest that English acts as an imperialist force that threatens other European languages and encroaches on their domains of use. However, when recapitulating the last century, one finds, by contrast, that the spread of English in Europe actually coincides with an overcoming of more imperialist-minded structures after World War II and the fall of the Iron Curtain (House 2003: 561). This contradiction indicates that the forms of English that are spreading across Europe are, from an anthropological perspective, generally perceived to be less imperialistic than linguistic human rights scholars suggest.

Such polemic moves as relabelling ELF as a "lingua frankensteinia" have lately drawn considerable criticism. Many researchers find the idea that the spread of English today is resultant in a concomitant spread of Anglo-American culture around the globe unconvincing, especially if it is claimed that native speakers of English are

the main agents behind this spread (e.g. Dewey 2007; Friedrich 2007, 2009; Graddol 2006; Kirkpatrick 2006; Saraceni 2008).³ From the point of view of ELF, this discussion also has the undesirable side effect of keeping native speakers firmly in their central position as “owners” of English. It is doubtful whether the fact that more and more people around the globe use English is tantamount to their adopting an Anglo-American mindset. Today English can be used to express various cultural models and identity affiliations (Wolf & Polzenhagen 2006: 294). Debates on linguistic imperialism tend to ignore the question why people take up English and how they do it, namely, in local appropriation (Pennycook 2003: 516). It seems that nowadays most people learn English voluntarily. There certainly is an increasing pressure to learn foreign languages in our globalised world, but this pressure is an aspect that relates to foreign languages in general, not just to English. Faced with this pressure, many (if not most) people opt for English, not because they aspire to become British or US American, but simply because choosing English can take away more of this pressure compared to other foreign languages whose degree of efficiency for communication across cultures is more limited. Most people see learning English as an activity that provides them with certain benefits (for example, in terms of communicative reach, on the job market or when travelling abroad). Few people who learn English as a foreign language have the feeling that they are swept over by Anglo-Americanisation or subject to neo-imperialist forces:

[...] the spread of English has also been a result of an active desire for English [...], which in turn cannot be dismissed as a form of misguided subjection to global hegemony without also bringing into play a heavy-handed notion of ideology that implies that the demand for English is only a superstructural reflection of neo-capital and English infrastructure.
(Pennycook 2011: 516)

In short, the top-down goal of EU multilingualism contrasts markedly with the bottom-up drive towards English in Europe, and it is doubtful whether the former stands any realistic chances of successful implementation in the face of the latter.

Gnutzmann (2008: 77) produces evidence that many non-native speakers do not have negative attitudes towards English. In a questionnaire study conducted with the staff and students at the Technical University of Braunschweig (GER), he finds that about 65% of the subjects have positive attitudes towards English, with neutral attitudes amounting to 30% (and negative attitudes to only 5%). Many, if not most, ELF speakers do not perceive their use of English as an instance of being victimised by Anglo-American imperialism (Yano 2009: 253) and creating such an awareness

3. As Graddol (2006: 112) points out, the spread of English is still unchallenged despite the fact that the US has significantly lost prestige internationally.

generally leads to nationalist reactions that can hardly be deemed helpful for the “European project”.

The strict equalisation of English with Anglo-American culture automatically denies non-native speakers the right to attach other identity values to their use of English. The claim that English can only be used to express an Anglo-American mind-set (e.g. Fiedler 2010) is reminiscent of discussions about linguistic relativism and more extreme readings of the Sapir-Whorf-hypothesis, which are generally no longer viewed as tenable today (Gnutzmann 2008: 78; House 2008a: 77). Even though language plays an important role in the expression of culture, this does not mean that culture is deterministically linked to language in the sense that the use of a certain language is restricted to an (automatic) construction of a certain national identity.

The argument that non-native speakers are disadvantaged in contexts where they either have to interact or compete with native speakers of English is of greater momentum than that of linguistic relativity in relation to English (Gnutzmann 2008: 81–83; Seidlhofer 2012), even though this may be less true than popularly believed (see House 2008a: 70). This is an argument that is not specific to English and pertains to all languages that are learnt as foreign languages. Furthermore this argument can easily be turned on its head, because ELF enables speakers to communicate with people from cultures around the world. The use of English for such purposes is therefore a clear advantage that may be said to outweigh the disadvantages non-native speakers have to face (Mukherjee 2008: 114). The more English becomes established as a lingua franca, the smaller these disadvantages will become.

An explanation for the fact that English is not a “killer language” that works to the detriment of other European languages is given by House (2003). House takes into account the function of a certain language in people’s lives and makes a distinction between “languages of identification” and “languages of communication” (a distinction originally taken from Hüllen 1992). On the one hand, a speaker’s L1 serves as a language of ethnic/national identification. English as a foreign language, on the other hand, generally fulfils the pragmatic function of communicating with people outside one’s speech community and is therefore a language of communication. As each of these two language types is connected to a different function, they are unlikely to compete and can therefore exist side by side without one encroaching on the domains of the other (Lüdi 2002: 8ff). According to this reasoning, ELF as a language of communication does not pose a threat to European national languages, which are considered languages of identification.

Although this functional distinction seems to have great explanatory power (national languages are indeed only marginally threatened by ELF on the national level), there are also some points about this argumentation that need to be viewed more critically (see also Fiedler 2011). It is too simplistic to state that the use of one’s L1 is purely symbolic and not also a matter of communication. Conversely, it is implausible

to suggest that the use of ELF solely serves communicative purposes and is devoid of identification processes. A clear-cut distinction of these two categories of languages is therefore highly problematic (Jenkins 2006). This view is also shared, on a global scale, by Pennycook:

This categorization of global and local languages whereby English serves people as a language of international communication while local languages help maintain culture, tradition and identity underlies many current positions on TESOL⁴ (strengthening the effective teaching and learning of English around the world while respecting individuals' language rights), bilingualism and language rights. By relegating vernacular languages only to local expression, however, and by elevating English only to the role of international communication, such a view ignores the many complexities of local and global language use. (Pennycook 2007b: 104)

To transfer this back to the European context: a clear-cut distinction between languages of identification and languages of communication would rule out the possibility that English may also serve identity functions for non-native European speakers. This would seem highly unlikely in the face of abundant evidence that English is seen as a “trendy” language associated with modernity and progress in many contexts in which it is spoken as a “foreign” language (for example, in many Eastern European countries; Braselmann 2005: 165).

One of the fundamental problems associated with the linguistic imperialism approach is its conceptualisation of languages as strictly tied to the nation (or, in the case of minority languages, ethnicity). This seems counterintuitive for transnational communication, where languages are often used by speakers who do not originate from the national background stereotypically associated with a certain language. For English more specifically, such reasoning is tantamount to claiming that its use by non-native speakers in transnational European communication is an expression of speakers' desire to assimilate to Anglophone cultures and works as a promotion of national British or US American interests. Of course, English language teaching is today a lucrative business that provides native English countries with high financial benefits. On the identity plane, however, it is unlikely that most non-native speakers aim at assimilation to Anglophone cultures or see their own national affiliations threatened by their use of English as a European *lingua franca*.

As has been demonstrated in the preceding discussion, the question of whether the spread of English poses a threat to other European languages cannot be answered in general. The respective macro-context needs to be taken into account. On European soil, English is clearly a threat to minority languages in Anglophone nation states (for example, to Welsh, Scots and Scottish Gaelic in the UK; or to Irish in IRL). Minority

4. TESOL = Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages