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Global Interactions in English as a Lingua Franca

How written communication is changing under the influence of electronic media and new contexts of use

I. Introduction: The Use of English for International Communication

This volume explores how English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), to be understood 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" (Seidlhofer 2011: 7), is adopted and adapted by users from different lingua-cultural backgrounds who communicate in the written mode. So far, great attention has been devoted to spoken ELF, with the publication of a great number of studies[1] and the compilation of three well-established corpora of spoken-interactions, namely the ELFA[2], the VOICE[3] and the ACE[4] corpora. On the contrary, written discourse has not received much attention. This volume investigates how the different types of dynamic and temporary communities that ELF-users may form and identify with, adopt and adapt a common communication code on the occasion of interactions in the written mode. These communities are formed in an *ad-hoc* way in different contexts of use and have also been referred to as "constellations of interconnected practices" (Wenger 1998: 127), on the grounds of their dynamic and temporary nature[5]. Their members use ELF as a language of secondary socialization (cf. Seidlhofer 2011: 86), namely

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1   See list of references.
2   The ELFA (English as a Lingua Franca in Academic settings) corpus was launched at the University of Tampere under the leadership of Anna Mauranen (Mauranen 2003).
3   The VOICE (Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English) was launched at the University of Vienna under the directorship of Barbara Seidlhofer.
4   The Compilation of the ACE (Asian Corpus of English) has begun in Hong Kong with Andy Kirkpatrick leading a team in various parts of East Asia (Kirkpatrick 2010b).
5   In the chapters of this book, however, the expression 'community/communities of practice' has been used, once the caveat has been added, that they need to be treated as more fluid than originally envisaged.

as a means of communication to conduct transactions outside their primary social space and speech community.

Since the advent of the Internet, community-membership is not established merely on the grounds of face-to-face contacts any longer, as companies and individuals alike have found themselves within a new era, which is *informational*, *global*, and highly *networked*. They have therefore had to adopt 'electronic propinquity' (Korzenny 1978) as the new substitute for 'physical propinquity', with electronic media turning into a vital source of communication, enabling people to interact at any time, in different places. Accordingly, since most communicative exchanges are carried out via the net, the analysis of ELF-using communities of practice becomes closely intertwined with the great changes in communication practices brought about by the advent of the Internet, which have inevitably had an impact on the repertoires of existing genres.

In fact, while in the beginning web genres were simple reproductions of familiar genres, with small but subtle features of adaptation to the new medium, they have gradually started to rely on the characteristics of the hypertext medium and on the availability of an expanding audience. Attempts to devise a model for web genres classification have therefore emerged. According to Sheperd and Watters's classification (1998: 9), for instance, cybergenres can be: *extant*, when they are based on the replication of conventional genres; or *novel*, with no similar exemplar in any other medium. The web genre repertoire can therefore be defined as a continuum where there are forces from the past, the present and the future interacting together (Santini 2006: 2). As a consequence, a precise classification of web genres may prove difficult and fuzzy, since the web genres' boundaries are not clearly defined and are in constant evolution.