English as a Lingua Franca in service encounters with migrants in Belgium: moving away from the social vacuum

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Masterproef voorgelegd tot het bekomen van de graad van

Master in de Taal- en Letterkunde: Twee talen

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Acknowledgments

This dissertation would not have been possible without the cooperation of the social workers and clients at Transithuis Gent. I especially want to thank Patricia, for letting me observe her and expressing a sincere interest in my research. Secondly, I want to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Katrijn Maryns, for her devotion to her students and their research, her support when I found myself in doubt and her extremely useful feedback and insights.

Next, I want to thank the people who took the time to read and comment on earlier drafts of this paper, my mother, father, Hannah and Simon. Of course, I should not forget those who supported me in so many other ways during this time: Luka for her expertise on 'how-to-write-a-thesis', Marit and Naomi for our shared thesis-suffering days, Wine for being Wine and Jochen for reminding me to 'think first and panic later'.
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List of abbreviations

Most of the abbreviations are explained throughout the dissertation. Nevertheless, for the sake of clarity, I provide the reader with a separate list below.

C (in transcriptions): Client
CAW: Centrum Algemeen Welzijnswerk
CGRS: Office of the Commissioner General For Refugees and Stateless Persons
EFL: English as a Foreign Language
ELF: English as a Lingua Franca
EIL: English as an International Language
ELT: English Language Teaching
ENL: English as a Native Language
INT (in transcriptions): Intern
L1: First Language
LFC: Lingua Franca Core
NS: Native Speaker
NNS: Non-Native Speaker
SW (in transcriptions): Social Worker
Introduction

Bratislava, September 2012, Tourist office. I enter the office to ask for the train schedule to travel further towards the inland of Slovakia. First I want to know if the man at the desk speaks English, because next to my mother tongue Dutch, English is the language I know best. When he answers this question positively, I continue the conversation in English. He searches for the schedule and is able to tell me when and where I can take the train. The communication runs fairly smoothly, although neither of us is a native English speaker. While I am looking at the schedule that is just handed to me, two other men enter the office. They want to know where the police station is. They ask this in English, without first inquiring whether the man at the desk is able to speak or understand this language. They have an obvious British accent and speak very fast. The man of the tourist office does not understand them and they have to repeat their question.

This fairly common example makes several aspects surface that are the prime subjects of research on English as a lingua franca (ELF). English is being used as a medium of communication between people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds around the world, every day, and in many different settings. Consequently, English is the prime lingua franca in the contemporary world and the number of people that use English is increasing rapidly (Crystal 2003: 110). Remarkably, these people are mostly non-native speakers of the language. Accordingly, encounters in ELF are characterised by a low percentage of native-speakers and are highly multicultural. Evidently, the situations in which ELF is used are also extremely diverse.

These facts have not gone unnoticed by scholars in the linguistic field, and because of the vast number of non-native speakers who use English as a lingua franca, research has increasingly been focusing on this particular use of English. Research has been conducted in different domains, such as ELF in business encounters (Pitzl 2005, Cogo 2012) and academic settings (Mauranen 2006, Metsä-Ketelä 2012). Early research has particularly engaged in exploring the differences between English as a lingua franca and English as a native language (ENL). The findings show how non-native speakers of English proficiently engage in ELF talk, and although their language use does not always conform to native speaker norms, they are still able to achieve mutual understanding. More specifically, the research shows how users of ELF successfully and creatively engage in strategies to ensure a smooth development of interaction. These strategies are called ‘convergence’ or ‘accommodation strategies’, and involve repetition of words, paraphrasing or code-switching (Cogo 2009, Hülmbauer 2007;2009, Klimpfinger 2007). Next to these strategies, researchers have also investigated recurring grammatical, phonological and other features in ELF communication, such as the omission of the third person –s (Seidlhofer 2004) or substituting /ə/ by /s/, /f/ or /t/ (Jenkins 2000), distinguishing it
further from ENL. Therefore, ELF has frequently been compared to emerging independent varieties of English, such as Indian or Nigerian English. This comparison and the divergence from ENL norms are some of the main reasons why some scholars have been reluctant in accepting the concept of ELF. Consequently, there has been an ongoing debate on the way in which ‘English as a lingua franca’ should be conceived of.

In my bachelor paper ('The use of English as a lingua franca: An analysis of ELF talk in institutional encounters in Flanders', 2012), I investigated to what extent English could be used as a functional and reliable communicative resource in a specific institutional setting in Flanders. For my research, I recorded interviews that were conducted in English between Flemish social workers and immigrants with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds at Transithuis in Ghent, which is an organization that gives assistance to foreigners in Belgium. In November and December 2011, I assembled a corpus of spoken ELF interaction that contains 8 interviews, all between 10 minutes and 1 hour long. Through a detailed analysis of the data, I concluded that in the observed settings, English functions quite well as a lingua franca. I observed how the participants in the data accommodated by helping each other come up with specific words or by finding a suitable translation for a domain-specific word. These findings coincide with existing ELF research. In the context of my master dissertation, I decided to record three more interviews in April 2013, to regain familiarity with the specific research setting.

However, in my bachelor paper, I also concluded that, due to the use of unflagged code-switches, reference to domain-specific knowledge and difficult terminology, the communication did not run smoothly at all times. In addition, I observed that in the literature, because existing ELF research is mostly set in highly cooperative settings with symmetric participation patterns, there has not been much attention to problematic features of ELF that I noticed in my data. On the contrary, in research on misunderstanding in ELF communication, the focus is on how ELF users competently overcome communicative difficulties or prevent them by deploying particular communicative strategies (e.g. Kaur 2011, Mauranen 2006, Pitzl 2005). Certainly, these are valid observations, but they cannot be generalised for every ELF use. Therefore, I have stated in my bachelor paper that the factor ‘context’ needs to be kept in mind when discussing the language use of ELF speakers. I want to emphasise that my understanding and use of the concept ‘context’ in this dissertation refers to the setting in which the interaction takes place, the situation or the context of use. I refer to the context that surrounds and influences a particular interaction and which can account for “relevant properties of participants and their social identities, roles and relations, as well as the social actions performed in such a situation” (Van Dijk 2007: 3).

The clients at Transithuis are in need of exact understanding of what the social worker explains, because this is crucial information that concerns the client’s well-being. Misunderstandings can have a very great impact here. Consequently, the social worker needs to
be able to explain everything fully and clearly. As can be imagined, this is not an easy job for a non-native speaker. More generally, I have claimed, following Dewey (2009), that ELF research needs more grounding in social reality, thus taking into account the diverse contexts in which ELF is used around the world. After all, it is clear that the context of Transithuis cannot be compared to the relaxed service encounter in Bratislava, in the example given at the beginning of this introduction.

In this dissertation, using data collected in 2011 and 2013 at Transithuis, it is my intention to make these general conclusions more concrete by looking in more detail at what the influential contextual factors are that cause a discrepancy between my findings and previous ELF research. I do not wish to discredit previous ELF research in any way. Rather, I want to take a broader outlook on ‘English as a lingua franca’, by examining differences between my research context and that of other ELF researchers. Accordingly, I focus more on each interaction as a whole and as it is situated within a specific context of use, to account for communicative choices and/or problems. I thus move away from the detailed search for emerging ELF features, with which early ELF researchers were preoccupied.

I have to concede however, that ELF research has taken on different perspectives, since the writing of my bachelor paper. The identification of specific language features has made way for research on the underlying strategies and processes that can explain the emergence of those features (Jenkins et al. 2011: 287). Nevertheless, although scholars have made room for flexible and fluid characterizations of ELF, the emphasis remains on specific linguistic properties of ELF, with little attention to contextual factors or other non-linguistic influences on lingua franca communication. However, the latest contributions to ELF research in the newly established Journal of English as a lingua franca (first edition in March 2012), contain similar arguments as can be found in this dissertation.

It is clear that ELF research is a young discipline and that it moves and shifts very quickly. The fast growth has created much confusion about the exact stance of ELF scholars towards the subject (Jenkins et al. 2011). Therefore, I start this dissertation with a thorough account of developments in ELF research, from the beginning to where it stands now (Chapter 1). I begin with the pioneers Barbara Seidlhofer and Jennifer Jenkins (respectively 2001 and 2000) and end with the most recent development, the Journal of English as a lingua franca, of which two more editions were published during the writing of this dissertation. The first chapter ends with an elaboration on language ideologies, and how they may affect the acceptance of the concept of ELF, and ELF research itself. I chose to incorporate this section because popular perceptions of language and language use cannot be left out in the overall argument of grounding research in social reality.
In chapter 2, I give a brief account of the methodology applied in this dissertation and introduce my own recorded data and research setting. I analyse three different conversations at Transithuis, each displaying different kinds of communicative difficulties, due to several influential contextual factors. Furthermore, I elaborate thoroughly on these influential factors and try to account for why and how they play an important role in the interaction at Transithuis, and, consequently, how they affect ELF communication in this setting. Thus, I draw attention to some issues in ELF communication that have either been dismissed or ‘underaddressed’ in previous research on the subject.

In the subsequent chapter (chapter 3), I relate these issues more directly to the overview of ELF research that was given in chapter 1. In addition, I divide the findings of the data analysis into three main categories of contextual factors that have an impact on the communication at Transithuis, which are further complicated through the use of English by non-native speakers. These factors are: the intricate relationship between the social worker and the client(s), the complex content of the conversations and the varying levels of competence in English, which complicate the use of accommodation strategies and convergence. Finally, I relate these findings to very recent publications on ELF, which similarly put ELF in a broader perspective (Haberland 2013), pay attention to extra-linguistic features that come into play during ELF communication (Gal 2013) and include a developmental perspective on ELF, which accounts for less successful ELF talk (Albl-Mikasa 2013). Accordingly, I conclude that my perspective and findings coincide with these recent developments in ELF research, which increasingly focus on variable aspects of ELF. I suggest that further ELF research should diversify between different contexts of use and in addition, incorporate more research settings to achieve a fuller understanding of how English is used as a lingua franca.
Chapter 1: Literature review

1.1 An introduction to ELF research

Research on the topic of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) is fairly recent and the debate on the key issues concerning ELF is definitely not settled yet. Even the term 'ELF' in itself is almost impossible to define unambiguously. In 2007, Jennifer Jenkins wrote that there was no consensus yet on the subject and even today, six years later, this is still the case. In this section I want to offer an overview of ELF research so far, the main critiques it has received, and the directions it is likely to take.

1.1.1 Terminology

To begin this overview, it is useful to have a closer look at the way ELF is defined in the literature. Jenkins defines a lingua franca as "a contact language used among people who do not share a first language" (2007: 1) and Mauranen calls it "a language of communication between speakers for whom it is an additional language" (2009: 1). These two definitions are combined in the definition on the website of VOICE (Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English), where ELF is defined as "an additionally acquired language system which serves as a common means of communication for speakers of different languages" (cited in Jenkins et al. 2011: 283). As we will see later on, these definitions are not as clear-cut as they would seem at first sight.

Especially the existence of closely related terms makes a straightforward definition of ELF very difficult. The term ELF, but also the separate concept 'lingua franca', has been used in many different contexts and in many different ways in the existing literature on the subject. As far as the term 'lingua franca' is concerned, also other terms such as 'contact language', 'auxiliary language', 'trade language' and 'trade jargon' are found (Jenkins et al. 2011). The term 'English' in 'English as a lingua franca' is also found in the concepts 'English as a Foreign Language' (EFL) or 'English as an International Language' (EIL). Especially EIL and ELF are often used interchangeably. EFL is used for learners who ultimately want to achieve ENL (Jenkins 2007). To give an overview, I include a table with concise definitions of the different acronyms. I want to note, however, that in the literature, the terminology is not used consistently, especially because scholars attach different meanings to the same concept or vice versa. The table represents my understanding and use of the different concepts.¹

¹ The VOICE initiative is discussed more elaborately in section 1.2

² See also Crystal 2003:108 for an overview of the applied acronyms in English linguistics. Note however, that Crystal does not include ELF.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>ENL</strong></th>
<th>English as a Native Language</th>
<th>‘Standard’ English, conform to native speaker norms, as it is spoken in countries with English as a first or second language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EFL</strong></td>
<td>English as a Foreign Language</td>
<td>English as it is taught and learnt in countries where it is a foreign language, with ENL as the learning model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EIL</strong></td>
<td>English as an International Language</td>
<td>English as it is being used around the world, for international communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ELF</strong></td>
<td>English as a Lingua Franca</td>
<td>Related to EIL, but with a specific focus on English as a communicative tool, successfully used between non-native speakers and seen as emerging independently from native speaker norms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next to these concepts, also Kachru's concentric circles offer a useful insight, given that scholars tend to rely on it extensively when talking about the global spread of English. I will occasionally apply this terminology in this research paper. Kachru visualises three concentric circles in which English has spread around the world (see figure 2). At the centre we find the ‘inner circle’, in which the countries are situated where English is the primary language (the UK, the USA, Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand). The second circle is called the ‘outer circle’. It contains countries (more than fifty territories) where English has come to play an important institutional role and is considered a second language (Crystal 2003: 107). The largest circle is the ‘expanding circle’. In light of ELF research, this is the most important one, as it consists of the countries in which English is taught as a foreign language and in which its international status is generally acknowledged (Belgium, for example, is situated in the expanding circle). From a different perspective, the inner circle is also conceived of as “norm-providing”, the outer circle as “norm-developing” and the expanding circle as “norm-dependent” (Mesthrie et al. 2000: 305). If

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3 For the discussion of Kachru, I rely on Crystal 2003:107
we want to include ELF into figure 2, we could imagine it as surrounding and cutting across the three circles (see also Seidlhofer 2011: 4). ELF in this perspective is then not bound to one specific geographical location or community, and definitely not to the native speaker of the inner circle. A supporting argument for this claim is the observation that nowadays English is used more among non-native than native speakers (see for example Seidlhofer 2001: 141 or 2011: 2-3). As a consequence, ELF is often considered to be an emerging variety within the Expanding circle, and maybe even developing its own norms, independent from 'Inner circle English'.

Figure 1: Kachru’s concentric circles (as presented in Crystal 2003: 107)

English has been used as a lingua franca since the colonization of the outer circle countries in the sixteenth century. However, this does not mean that it immediately was an interesting research topic. It remained in the margins of linguistic research until the late twentieth century, when the term ELF was first used in its modern sense by two German academics, Werner Hüllen and Karlfried Knapp (Jenkins et al 2011: 282). Still, the identification of the phenomenon involved no more than independent evaluations of ELF in the late 1990s. ELF research in its current form only got a head start with two publications from the beginning of the twenty-first century (Jenkins et al 2011: 282). The authors of these pioneer publications, Jennifer Jenkins (The phonology of English as an international language, 2000) and Barbara Seidlhofer ('Closing a conceptual gap: The case for a description of English as a Lingua Franca’, 2001), are still considered authoritative figures in the field. Therefore, the following section consists mostly of a discussion of their (earlier) views on the subject.
1.1.2 The pioneers

In her work, Jenkins denotes some advantages of the term ELF next to terms such as EIL, EFL and others:

ELF emphasizes the role of English in communication between speakers from different L1s, [...] it suggests the idea of community as opposed to alienness; it emphasizes that people have something in common rather than their differences; [...] finally, the Latin name symbolically removes the ownership of English from the Anglos both to no one and, in effect, to everyone.

(Jenkins 2000: 11)

Also for Seidlhofer, it is clear that English as a native language is different from English as a lingua franca (2001, 138-139). As the title of her article in 2001 (‘Closing a conceptual gap: the case for a description of English as a lingua franca’) suggests, Seidlhofer emphasises greatly the need for a description of ELF alongside nativized varieties of English (2001: 138). These nativized varieties are the “new Englishes” (Mesthrie et al. 2000: 298), that have been developing in the outer circle countries, for example in India or Nigeria, where Indian and Nigerian English are considered an official second language. They have become independent from ENL in the inner circle and have changed into local languages with localised features (Mesthrie et al. 2000: 301).

Seidlhofer even argues “that it is both necessary and feasible to enquire into a suitable model for ELF” (2001: 141). To establish this model, she has created a corpus of ELF speech and established “an index of communicative redundancy” (2001: 147). This index contains for example grammatical features which can be left out without compromising comprehensibility (cf. infra). It was clearly Seidlhofer’s goal at the time to see if a codification of ELF was plausible and to offer an alternative to English as a native language (Seidlhofer 2001: 150). She explains that in the ELF research paradigm, “mutual accommodation is found to have greater importance for communicative effectiveness than ‘correctness’ or idiomaticity in ENL terms” (Seidlhofer 2001: 147). To make the work of Seidlhofer and other ELF researchers more tangible, I include an example from my own corpus of conversations in ELF in an institutional setting in Flanders, which I assembled for my bachelor paper in 2011-2012. This offers a glance on the typical interactions ELF researchers are taking an interest in:
**Extract 1**

1) C: For me is no problem because now my euh my boss asked the lawyer to do to.
2) SW: To do appeal
3) C: To do appeal. something like that
4) SW: Yes
5) C: But I’m not sure that the the answer is will positive or negative

**Extract 2**

1) SW: Even if EVEN if you would have the working permit of y like suppose you are a specialised chief in cooking Thai food nobody else can they cannot find any ch ch euh chief like that. Or chief you say chief?
2) C: Chef
3) SW: Chef chef hm ((laughs))

Both extracts come from the same interview between a Flemish social worker and her Thai client. We see English successfully being used as a lingua franca between two non-native speakers. Although their English does not conform to ENL norms at all times, there is no communicative breakdown in this interaction. In extract 1 we see how both interactants actively participate in achieving mutual understanding, by helping the other come up with a specific word. In this extract the client signals that he is satisfied with the phrase used by the social worker, although this utterance may not be an exact equivalent of what he actually wanted to say. In extract 2, it is the social worker who explicitly asks for help from the client because she is aware that she does not know the exact word for ‘kok’ (Dutch) in English. It is interesting to notice that none of the participants loses face or is considered incompetent in any way. This is what has been addressed in the literature as a benefit of the “non-nativeness” which the participants have in common (Hülmbauer 2009: 335).

The way in which Seidlhofer aims at an index for redundancy can again be linked to the views of Jennifer Jenkins. In her first book (*The phonology of English as an International Language*, 2000), Jenkins identifies several features that are typical of ELF phonology and calls this “the Lingua Franca Core” (LFC) (Jenkins 2000: 123). Left out from this core are the features that do not necessarily enhance intelligibility, for example the distinction between voiced and voiceless <th>, or the difference between rhotic and non-rhotic pronunciations (in favour of the rhotic accents). She proposes to incorporate the Lingua Franca Core into English language

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4 C= client  
SW= Social Worker  
See the section on methodology (2.1) for the transcription key.
teaching. This proposal, however, has created much controversy in the linguistic field and that was the incentive for Jenkins to write her second book (2007). In this book, she offers a definition of ELF (cf. supra) and addresses the main misconceptions concerning the phenomenon. Jenkins relies on Seidlhofer for her discussion of these misconceptions about English as a lingua franca. The list of the five main misunderstandings offers a summary of what most of the discussions on ELF are about. The most important ones are "misconception 3: ELF research aims at the accurate application of a set of prescribed rules" and "misconception 4: ELF researchers are suggesting that there should be one monolithic variety" (Seidlhofer 2006 in Jenkins 2007: 20). Jenkins and Seidlhofer claim that ELF research is (at least at that initial stage) purely descriptive, without prescribing a separate variety.

Since her article in 2001, Seidlhofer is known for the VOICE corpus she produced at the University of Vienna. Another corpus that has been set up since then, but is more specialised, is the ELFA (English as a Lingua Franca in Academic settings), created by Anna Mauranen (Jenkins et al.: 282). According to the team of researchers working on the VOICE corpus, we should understand their corpus as follows:

It is the ultimate aim of the VOICE project to open the way for a large-scale and in-depth linguistic description of this most common contemporary use of English by providing a corpus of spoken ELF interactions which will be accessible to linguistic researchers all over the world.
(Univie.ac.at/voice)

Furthermore, Seidlhofer is concerned with the well-being of ELF users, as she stresses that they differ from other learners of English because they no longer try to resemble native speakers of English (Seidlhofer 2009). She advocates clearly for acknowledging ELF users as authoritative agents (Seidlhofer 2001: 138). Accordingly, the VOICE corpus and the research at the University of Vienna have focused on gathering and analyzing successful communicative interactions in ELF. The initial research was primarily concerned with identifying and describing characteristic language features of ELF. This is how Seidlhofer came to the listing of the main lexicogrammatical features that are redundant in ELF speech, for example the third person –s, which causes no misunderstandings when it is left out (Jenkins et al. 2011). Examples, identified by Seidlhofer, of ‘errors’ that are made by students, but that do not cause any communicative problems are:

• Dropping the third person present tense –s
• Confusing the relative pronouns who and which
• Omitting definite and indefinite articles where they are obligatory in ENL, and inserting them where they do not occur in ENL
• Failing to use correct forms in tag questions (e.g. isn't it? or no? instead of shouldn't they?)
• Inserting redundant prepositions, as in We have to study about...
• Overusing certain verbs of high semantic generality, such as do, have, make, put, take
• Replacing infinitive-constructions with that-clauses, as in I want that
• Overdoing explicitness (e.g. black color rather than just black)

(Seidlhofer 2004: 220)

This widely distributed list has caused some controversy and is the source of much confusion and misunderstanding about English as a Lingua Franca, comparable to the controversy about Jenkins' LFC (cf. supra).

The emphasis has however shifted to analyzing more general communicative processes that make these features emerge: the pragmatic motives underlying these linguistic peculiarities (Jenkins et al.: 289 - 92). For example, Seidlhofer (2011: 107) argues that ELF speakers use ‘which’ instead of ‘who’ as a creative process to reduce processing effort for the interlocutor. The other features listed above are equally, in Seidlhofer’s view, strategies to reduce ambiguity or increase clarity. Also several general communication strategies have been identified, which we can broadly categorise as accommodation and convergence strategies. These can be defined as “ways of adjusting speech to facilitate communication” (Cogo 2009: 255) and more specifically as enabling speakers to “co-create a common ELF repertoire which ensures mutual understanding” (Hülmbauer 2007: 17). The following study is exemplary of this pragmatic turn in ELF research: Hülmbauer 2007 (‘the relationship between lexicogrammatical correctness and communicative effectiveness in English as a lingua franca’), in which she discusses for example the effective use of a non-idiomatic construction in the following extract:

S3: and so thi- (. ) this uncle is the brother of my (1) grandfather
S4: o:h (. ) okay @@
S3: so @@ er
S4: far away uncle @@=

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5 Hülmbauer uses the transcription conventions of the VOICE corpus (VOICE Project 2007: Voice Transcription Conventions [2.1]):
S1: speaker 1
@: laughter
(.): brief pause
(1): pause of 1 second
=: immediate continuation by the next speaker
Similarly, Klímpfinger 2007 (‘the role of code-switching in English as a lingua franca’) identifies different types of functional code-switches in ELF talk. A general finding from the research in ELF pragmatics is that non-natives are often better understood than native English speakers (Klímpfinger 2007). More importantly, whenever misunderstandings do occur, the ELF users are found to be very competent in overcoming these breakdowns (Jenkins et al. 2011: 293).

From this pragmatic perspective on ELF, research has also been carried out on how ELF users express certain aspects of their identity through ELF. According to Jenkins (2007) ELF users do not only signal their L1 identity, but they also bring a feeling of group affiliation to the table when communicating with fellow ELF users. This ‘group’ then, needs to be understood in terms of “the world at large” (Jenkins 2007: 198). In her research on English as a lingua franca and identity, Jenkins came to the conclusion that her participants felt some notion of community or commonality, as they said that they felt more at ease when speaking to other ELF users than when speaking to native English speakers (Jenkins 2007: 232). She concludes that “all English speakers need to [...] decide for themselves whether or not they truly believe that Anglo accent and norms are the most appropriate for lingua franca communication” (Jenkins 2007: 233). In her concluding chapter, Jenkins seems to pursue the same goal as Seidlhofer did in 2001, namely a codification of ELF through which a feasible alternative to EFL, and independent from ENL, should become available (Jenkins 2007: 250). This seems to contradict her earlier discussion on misconceptions of ELF. Jenkins however does acknowledge that

the changes currently taking place in expanding circle Englishes are part of a natural phenomenon, and that the current anxiety in the face of any language change is a natural response. ELF, however, is likely to continue to evolve on its own accord as long as English remains the principal global lingua franca, regardless of the wishes of those who find it distasteful and independent of the pedagogic considerations and decisions that may follow later.

(Jenkins 2007: 252)

1.1.3 Reactions to the research

Taking this conclusion of Jenkins as a starting point, I now turn to some reactions to ELF research. Who are these people that find the unstoppable force of ELF ‘distasteful’? On the one
hand, we see objections to English as a lingua franca emerging from an emotional attachment to
the English language. These reactions tend to be overtaken, and are in many cases based on
irrational prejudice. They therefore seem to be dismissible, but since these views are
widespread and often founded on deeply rooted ideologies, they cannot be left out. Therefore, I
elaborate on two language ideologies that affect thoughts on the concept of ELF in the second
part of this chapter. According to Jenkins (2007), scholars use different techniques to devalue
the concept of ELF. She sees how Crystal (1997), for example, tends to ignore the phenomenon
of ELF altogether and how Preisler (1999) formulates a direct attack on ELF by calling it
"pidginized and unidiomatic" (Preisler 1999 in Jenkins 2007: 40).

On the other hand, there are academics who offer critical observations on ELF research
without dismissing the concept. Since ELF research is moving very fast and reactions and
publications are numerous, I will confine my overview to a selection of reactions that are most
interesting in light of my own critical view on the subject.

Another contestant to the idea of English as a lingua franca as a legitimate form of
English, is the sociolinguist Peter Trudgill. He argues that the English language belongs to the
native speakers, because they were the first users (Trudgill 2005 in Jenkins 2007). Brutt-Griffler
goes against this claim by stating that "English as a national language is only the source of the
world language, not the world language itself" (Brutt-Griffler 2002, as cited in Jenkins 2007: 8).

The question of ownership of the English language is a hot topic in the discussions on ELF. We
still talk about 'English', but is the 'E' in ELF the same English as the English in Great Britain or
America, or does it have more in common with the Englishes in the outer circle countries?
Following Haberland (2011: 941), we can divide the different camps in the discussion in terms
of purists versus pragmatists. Accordingly, Trudgill promotes a purist view in stating that the
ownership of English lies with its native speakers. Other purists, according to Haberland, are for
example Prator and Quirk, who on the surface do not plead for the superiority of the native
speaker, but who are against the development of parallel norms or other alternative proposals
(2011: 941). The pragmatists, on the other hand, are those who claim that the language is owned
by all who use it (see MacKenzie 2009, discussed below). The former group is associated with
prescriptivism, while the latter is often considered to have a "laissez-faire attitude" (Haberland
2011: 941). Haberland makes clear that this dichotomy cannot be maintained at all times, since
both prescriptivism and 'laissez-faire' are found on both sides. For example, a purist 'laissez-
faire' argument could be that the native speaker finds prescriptivism unnecessary, since he
knows best (Haberland 2011: 942). Similarly, some pragmatist do not advocate non-
interventionism, but rather want to prescribe new standards. In this view, prescriptivism is not
necessarily a form of conservatism (Ibid.). Hence, Haberland introduces the idea of "proactive
pragmatists" (2011: 942). His statement that prescriptivism "does not necessarily have to have
the aim of preserving the existing standards, it can also take the form of proposing new standards” (Haberland 2011: 942) is applicable to the ideas of Jenkins and Seidlhofer.

As mentioned earlier, the pioneers in ELF studies in its current form clearly want to see English as a lingua franca as something different from English as a native language. They believe in the codifiable nature of ELF and the emergence of new standards. Moreover, they also discuss the differences between English as a Foreign language and ELF. It is stressed that ELF users do not aim at native speaker norms, because they will use it in contact with other non-native speakers. Acquiring traditional EFL, reliant on ENL, is therefore not desirable for these users (see table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Linguacultural norms</th>
<th>Foreign language (EFL)</th>
<th>Lingua Franca (ELF)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pre-existing, re-affirmed</td>
<td>ad hoc, negotiated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>integration, membership in NS community</td>
<td>intelligibility, communication in a NNS or mixed NNS-NS interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processes</td>
<td>imitation, adoption</td>
<td>accommodation, adaptation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Conceptual differences between EFL and ELF
(Seidlhofer 2011: 18)

This view is not shared by everyone. One such scholar who does not agree with this, is Ian MacKenzie (2009). Focussing on the use of English in Europe, he argues against the plausibility of English developing into a stable variety that is independent of native English norms (2009: 224). Furthermore, as far as ELF exists, he sees it as a means of communication and not of identification. This claim goes against what we have seen in Jenkins (2007), but follows House (whose views are discussed more elaborately below). House (2003: 559 – 560) differentiates between ELF, which is used for instrumental purposes, and other parts of the individual linguistic repertoire, which are used to determine one’s identity. We should note that MacKenzie predominantly talks about English for scientific purposes, which is not the focus of Seidlhofer and Jenkins’ research. This can be seen in the claim that “scientific English (...) is only used to communicate impersonal experimental results, and is a form of EIL, rather than a language expressing personal identity” (MacKenzie 2009: 226; my emphasis). English in Europe, MacKenzie says, is an additional language and cannot be seen in the same light as English in Africa or Asia, since it does not share the same history of colonization. Europe is also too large to
be seen as a separate and uniform speech community. This additional language is what MacKenzie sees as being called ELF (2009: 227). Here, he tries to steer a middle course as he does not agree with Phillipson (2008) who does not even want to call the phenomenon a 'lingua franca’. He is however also not in line with the scholars who try to codify ELF, or with those who see it as an emerging separate variety. As far as Jennifer Jenkins is concerned, MacKenzie does not agree with her on the endonormative approach to ELF, which considers ELF as norm-developing instead of norm-dependent (cf. Kachru’s model of concentric circles). In other words, moving away from the ENL norm is not what he thinks is best. Because of the considerable overlap, he finds it reasonable to compare ELF with ENL. He concludes his article by stating that the ownership of English is a plural matter: English belongs to both native speakers and non-native speakers (MacKenzie 2009: 233). MacKenzie reacts to an example that Seidlhofer gave of written ELF (an editorial from an eastern European website called ‘Abolishing the Borders from Below’) by saying that it does not contain the specific linguistic features that she had identified previously (cf. the index of redundancy):

As you probably noticed the English which is used in this newspaper is very far from its grammatical and stylistic ideals. It is mostly because this is a level of English which most of our correspondents, big part of our readers and most of us (as editors) are using. So at first, we obviously prefer to communicate on this level of English which is understandable for ourselves (!) and secondly, we decided to be rather 'bad English reputation' newspaper as to rise a level of language and in this way eliminate probably 30-60% of our regular readers, especially in south and eastern Europe (which could not understand the texts anymore).

(Seidlhofer 2006, cited in Mackenzie 2009: 228 – 229. For obvious reasons, I did not make use of [sic] to mark ‘mistakes’ in this citation)

He states that the features are not used consistently and mixed profusely with native English elements (2009: 230). What is more, MacKenzie says, in other places Seidlhofer conceptualises ELF as variable, fluid and creative, which is contradictory because "if ELF is variable, fluid and creative, it is unlikely to be wholly rule-governed or codifiable" (2009: 230).

MacKenzie is not the only one who voices criticism concerning contradictory statements of both Seidlhofer and Jenkins. Scheuer (2010) also reacts on the inconsistencies within ELF research and claims that this is the main cause for misunderstandings about ELF. At times, there is indeed a discrepancy between what Jenkins and Seidlhofer write about ELF and their approach to ELF data for example. Another critique that stands out in MacKenzie’s article, is that Jenkins tends to put aside all counterarguments to ELF as misconceptions of ELF and the goal of
Jenkins (2007) acknowledges some of the shortcomings of ELF research. She explains that “as far as insecurity about ELF is concerned, its researchers may to some extent be part of the ‘problem’ in that they have taken some of these issues for granted, explained too little […]” (249).

For Phillipson (2008), the problem for Jenkins’ and Seidlhofer’s work lies in the term ‘Lingua Franca’ itself, which is open for too much interpretation:

I would claim that lingua franca is a pernicious, invidious term if the language in question is a first language for some people but for others a foreign language, such communication typically being asymmetrical. I would claim that it is a misleading term if the language is supposed to be neutral and disconnected from culture.

(Phillipson 2008: 262; italics in original)

To overcome this problem, Marko Modiano (2009) emphasises the differences between the general term ‘lingua franca’ and the use of the term ‘ELF’ in this specific research. The term ‘lingua franca’ denotes that English is used as an international language in general, while ‘ELF’ is used as a specific theoretical concept for the lingua franca that is used among non-native speakers, mainly in Europe (Modiano 2009: 209-210). Modiano is very much in favour of a distinct Euro-English variety, to some extent he thus supports Seidlhofer’s work. But he criticises her for ignoring regional distinctions. He does not understand whether she is talking about ELF “in some restricted geopolitical sense” (Modiano 2009: 210), or if she refers to English as a second language in international communication in general. In the latter sense, the distinction between ELF and EIL becomes blurred. As a consequence, it is not clear where Modiano himself draws the line between English as a lingua franca and English as an international language.

Also Firth (2009) admits that the term English as a ‘lingua franca’ may not be the ideal concept, but that it fits the current research purposes. For him it is the lesser of two evils, as EFL is too closely linked to a deficiency-perspective and EIL is “predicated on a notion of standardization and English-native-speaker judgments” (Firth 2009: 158). He even considers the widespread concept introduced by Kachru of ‘expanding circle English’ insufficient because it suggests an inferior status to the ‘inner circle’ (Firth 2009).

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6 See note 27 in the article of MacKenzie (p. 236)
1.1.4 A step forward

With the introduction of Firth, we are now among those who acknowledge the work of Jenkins and Seidlhofer, but want to take it a step forward. They incorporate variable aspects of ELF, place it in a wider perspective and focus less on theoretical, abstract conceptualisations of the phenomenon. In what follows I will briefly discuss publications of Firth (2009), Haberland (2010), House (2003) and Dewey (2007; 2009). I will then conclude this chapter by looking at the most recent developments in ELF research.

Firth (2009: 147) observes that there is indeed a “lingua franca factor” at play in the use of English internationally. This ‘factor’, for Firth, stands for the peculiar aspects of ELF, “linguistically, discursively, and interactionally” (2009: 147). He does not see the factor in the language, or in the discourse forms that are produced (as does for example Seidlhofer who identifies peculiar linguistic features), since he finds the systematic and predictable nature of ELF still an open question. He observes the factor in two other spheres. The first sphere he identifies is “entailment”, by which he means that ELF interactions are entailed with “inherent variability, both interactionally – as a form of social action – and in terms of linguistic ‘form’” (Firth 2009: 162). It is for Firth therefore “difficult, if not impossible, to describe this ‘language’ a priori.” (2009: 163; italics in original). This ‘inherent variability’ leads to the second sphere where he sees the ‘lingua franca factor’ of ELF: “metatheory” (2009: 164). In this sphere, Firth sees how traditional views on language are more and more contested and challenged by what he calls a “social and post-structural wave” (2009: 165). ELF research is exemplary of this wave, and Firth sees the chance for ELF scholars “to question the idea of language as a bounded, unitary ‘thing’ with a fixed code and a transcendent framework of exogenous norms” (2009: 165). Firth embraces the existence of an independent English as a lingua franca. He therefore also celebrates the VOICE corpus and the ELFA (cf. supra). He sees these as part of the “empirical turn” (Firth 2009: 148) in ELF research. He does however concede that in his opinion, the investigated database is narrow, because it merely focuses on casual conversations or English in business encounters, which is reflected in the findings, because the conversations are all characterised by a joint orientation to a “working consensus” (2009: 149).

Firth’s own early empirical work and findings are referred to in House’s article (2003). House’s characterization of ELF is therefore fairly similar:
ELF appears to be neither a restricted language for special purposes, nor a pidgin, nor an interlanguage, but one of a repertoire of different communicative instruments an individual has at his/her disposal, a useful and versatile tool, a ‘language for communication’ (House 2003: 559)

House makes a distinction between ‘languages for communication’ and ‘languages for identification’ (cf. supra). Language users, according to House, will still predominantly use their mother tongue to express features of identity. They thus remain member of the L1 speech community (2003: 560). Moreover, House states that “there is no identifiable group of ELF speakers”, so ELF is not used to align oneself with a specific group (House 2003: 560). In this way, House wants to do away with the threatening notion that some scholars attach to ELF and stress that it will not replace or marginalise local or national languages (2003: 560). Firth and House both appreciate the input of Seidlhofer and her colleagues and are convinced of the need for more empirical research into ELF. House (2003) does not refer to Seidlhofer too often, and seems to be taking her own course as she wants to take “hybridity as a linguistic-cultural norm” (2003: 574). This conceptualization is somewhat different than in Jenkins (2000; 2007) and Seidlhofer (2001) who, at least in their earlier publications, were still in favour of a fixed codification of ELF.

Haberland (2011: 947) also elaborates on the observation that ELF is used in so many diverse contexts that we cannot speak of a separate speech community of ELF users. Haberland seems not convinced of the homogenous nature of ELF and he explicitly states that “there is no way ELF could be taught” (Haberland 2011: 943). He does share the view of Seidlhofer and Jenkins that ELF users need to be accepted as equal owners of the English language and legitimate speakers of English. This, Haberland argues, will require considerable tolerance of language gatekeepers, but also of receivers of ELF messages, the actual ELF users (2011: 947). This kind of tolerance, though, should not be “unlimited and unguided” (Haberland 2011: 947). For Haberland, the main criterion for guiding the necessary tolerance is “recognizability” (Ibid). Haberland thus seems to be in favour of some form of language maintenance, but the source for this need not be older standards of ENL. He places ELF in a wider perspective and considers viewing English as a “global public good” (Haberland 2011: 943). It can be seen as a public good in that its use is “non-rivalrous”, language does not disappear after being used, and “non-excludable”, because it is accessible to everyone (Haberland 2011: 944). Languages are also cultivated and maintained by institutions, and thus not so different from other public goods.

7 He seems to be a proactive pragmatist himself (cf. supra)
Public goods in the age of globalization grow beyond national borders and become ‘global public goods’. English, which has spread its benefits and expenses across national borders, can be regarded in this way (Haberland 2011: 944). The key question for Haberland remains then: “who takes care of transnational English or English as a lingua franca as a global public good?” (Haberland 2011: 945).

The introduction of ELF into the wider perspective of globalization can also be found in the work of Martin Dewey (2007; 2009). This work has been picked up in the more mainstream ELF research, and especially, it has changed some views of Jenkins (see Jenkins et al. 2011 and below). Dewey’s contributions are exemplary of the focus shift that current ELF research is taking and with which I will align in the following chapters of this thesis. As I stated earlier in this chapter, a primary change in the ELF research was a move away from identifying separate language features that could make up a distinct variety of English as a lingua franca, in the direction of more general underlying communicative strategies. Dewey explains this as follows:

It is of course inevitable that ELF research has begun in this fashion: as a newly emerging field of enquiry it has needed to engage with the current frames of reference, and inevitably much of our empirical work has so far needed to focus especially on the surface level features in order to highlight the ways in which ELF speakers are actively involved in the creative use of linguistic resources.

(Dewey 2009: 68)

But more is necessary to complete the current focus shift. According to Dewey, this entails seeing language less as an object, and focus on the “actualization” or “performativity” of language (Dewey 2009: 68). This all fits into Dewey’s main claim for “reconnecting with the social world” (2009: 69). He wants to see ELF in a much broader framework that entails both the local creativity of the language user and the political and social implications of the global spread of English (see Dewey 2007; 2009). This coincides with a much earlier idea of Alastair Pennycook (1994: 26) that we need to reconcile structuralism, which sees “language as an idealized, abstract system disconnected to its surroundings” and materialism, which “reduces it to its contexts and therefore sees language use as determined by worldly circumstance” (Ibid).

In Dewey’s (2007) point of view, the current developments in the English language are inevitable, and most importantly, we need to put them into perspective. He draws attention to the fact that the current global status of English is just the most recent stage in the history of the language and that globalization is a transformational process that affects the language just as any other period of social change in the past (Dewey 2007: 350). ELF can be seen as a “phenomenon which characterises much of the contemporary world” (Dewey 2007: 350). As
such, to be able to characterise ELF correctly, we are in need of radical reconceptualisation of our ideas about language (Dewey 2007: 74). This entails the speaker community, which we need to see as a “community of practice” and the term ‘variety’, which according to Dewey is too stable “to adequately capture the fluid nature of ELF” (2009: 61). This characterization of ELF corresponds with Firth, House and Haberland (see above), who also focus on variability and position ELF in a wider perspective. The following statement, however, challenges most previously discussed analyses of ELF: “It is thus neither possible nor desirable to attempt a description of a uniform ELF variety” (Dewey 2007, 349). This claim also seems to go against the initial goal of Seidlhofer and Jenkins, but as I mentioned earlier, the work of Dewey has been picked up by Jenkins and her colleagues later on. To make this clear, I rely on conclusions from the ‘State-of-the-Art Article’ by Jenkins, Cogo and Dewey (2011).

1.1.5 Recent developments

In the beginning of this chapter, I cited the definition of ELF as found on the VOICE website. Jenkins et al. (2011) take this definition as a starting point, but also compare it with Firth’s early definition (from 1996). According to Jenkins et al., Firth completely excludes native speakers from the ELF paradigm, which is something they do not prefer. Furthermore, Firth differentiates too little between ELF and EFL (Jenkins et al. 2011: 283-284). A second idea that is formulated in the article, is the connection between the ELF paradigm and the research into World Englishes, since “both are concerned with the implications of the spread of English far beyond its original contexts of use” (Jenkins et al. 2011: 284). This does not coincide with the idea of MacKenzie (2009) that ELF (as found in Europe) cannot be seen in the same light as other Englishes. Notwithstanding certain commonalities, there are still great differences between the two paradigms:

[T]he world has become so interconnected, and English so bound up with the processes of globalization, that a traditional varieties orientation is no longer viable, and that we should, instead, focus on English as fluid, flexible and contingent, hybrid and deeply intercultural.

(Jenkins et al. 2011: 284)

This idea is directly influenced by the publications of Dewey (2007; 2009), but we can also see similarities with several other ideas that were discussed in this chapter. Following from this globalised, interconnected perspective is the claim that ELF research is not bound to one specific

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* A term originally from Wenger (1998)
geographical location. This offers an answer to Modiano’s confusion (above, 1.1.3). Nonetheless, we can differentiate between more European focused research (see the discussion of MacKenzie and Modiano in 1.1.3) and East Asian research (for example Kirkpatrick 2010) (Jenkins et al. 2011: 285).

We have seen how several misunderstandings have arisen from initial publications on ELF. I summed up the two most important (or most confusing) ones, the first being “misconception 3: ELF research aims at the accurate application of a set of prescribed rules” (Jenkins 2007: 20). We saw that the original goal of the ELF research was a codification. Although it was not always stated explicitly, both Jenkins and Seidhlofer believed in the possibility of a codified ELF. In the State-of-the-Art article (Jenkins et al. 2011: 295) this is indeed admitted at once. Even so, although there has been a shift in focus from the specific language features towards attention for the underlying processes, the aim of codification has not been cast off entirely (Jenkins et al. 2011: 296). According to Jenkins et al., ELF researchers are facing a dilemma here, because a framework has to be established in which neither the regularities nor the fluid nature of ELF is left out (2011: 296). It is suggested that ELF does not fit into the dichotomy of either being a fixed language or being a “case of linguistic anarchy” (Jenkins et al. 2011: 297).  

The second misunderstanding that was addressed is the following: “misconception 4: ELF researchers are suggesting that there should be one monolithic variety” (Jenkins 2007, 20). This misunderstanding is equally bound up with the fluidity of ELF interactions. Following Dewey’s view (2007, see above), Jenkins et al. want to argue that ELF should not be seen as a separate variety:

Research has begun to demonstrate how proficient (...) ELF speakers exhibit substantial linguistic variation in their interactions for a range of purposes, including the projection of cultural identity, the promotion of solidarity, the sharing of humour and so on (...) (Jenkins et al. 2011: 296)

Hence, the second problem that ELF researchers are facing, is to determine what ELF exactly is (Jenkins et al. 2011: 296). This entails, as mentioned previously, a renegotiation of some basic concepts in language theory, such as ‘variety’ and ‘speech community’. As we have seen in some reactions of other researchers, also Jenkins et al. want to place ELF in a broader framework of globalization. ELF in this light is considered both a “globalized and globalizing phenomenon” (Jenkins et al. 2011: 303). In addition to this broader framework, also the pedagogic implications are discussed more generally. First, learners and teachers of English need to understand the

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9 Mortensen (2013) very recently has addressed this dilemma. This will be discussed in chapter 3.
variability of language use (Jenkins et al 2011: 306). It is stated that it was never the intention of ELF research to offer an alternative model for English language teaching (ELT) (Jenkins et al. 2011: 305). Nonetheless, very recently, there have been some proposals to integrate findings of ELF research into ELT. These can be found in the recently established *Journal of English as a lingua franca* (2011, edited by Barbara Seidlinhofer, Anna Mauanen and Jennifer Jenkins). This journal can be considered the most recent development in ELF studies and will probably increase interest, acceptance and tolerance towards English as a lingua franca.

Before concluding this chapter and moving on to my own data analysis, I include a brief account on language ideologies.

### 1.2 Language ideology and the implications for ELF (research)

I mentioned reactions to ELF research which are founded on particular language ideologies which directly or indirectly relate to the issue of language ownership. Next to linguistic ownership rights, however, also other language ideologies come about in the discussion of ELF.

Kroskrity (2004) compares and contrasts several definitions of ‘language ideology/ies’ of which I find the following most useful here: language ideologies are “sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use” (Silverstein 1979, cited in Kroskrity 2004: 497), combined with the idea that they are “the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests” (Irvine 1989, cited in Kroskrity 2004: 497). These “thoughts about language” (Kroskrity 2004: 496), as we can call them, tend to be widely spread and deeply rooted in the perceptions of language users.

We cannot ignore language ideologies in the discussion of ELF, because, whatever stance scholars may take towards language ideologies, popular perceptions of language cannot be dismissed, especially not if we want to ground ELF research in everyday social reality (this idea is also articulated by Joseph 2004 in Jenkins 2007: 205). Observations such as Jenkins’ (2007: 205) that non-native speakers of English may not necessarily regard themselves as successful ELF users and thus may not share the perspective of the linguist, are therefore crucial. Also Milroy (2001: 538) remarks that “public opinions are deeply and sincerely held and are widespread in society” and therefore “they have to be [...] respected and taken seriously”. Kroskity (2004: 496) points out the existing variation within language ideologies, according to age for example. For instance, Jenkins et al. (2011: 307) claim “that some younger English users orient favourably towards ELF” in contrast with reluctant acceptance of ELF of others.

At the centre of the ideological discussion of ELF, we find what is known as the *standard language ideology*, which entails matters such as prestige, power and linguistic gatekeeping. These kind of ideological perceptions are called into question due to the spread and use of
English worldwide. It is therefore not surprising that ELF is accepted reluctantly, as it challenges deeply rooted beliefs. Also tied up with ideological concerns, is the debate on linguistic imperialism. Several researchers, such as Seidlhofer, who relies on Widdowson for this argument, stress the difference between English as a distributed language and English as a spreading language (Seidlhofer 2001). If we would consider the ‘distribution’ of English, it is still tied to one or more geographical places and moreover, it would in any case be related to the native speaker, who allows his/her language to be distributed. In addition, the ‘distribution-frame’ conceptualises English in the expanding circle as ‘norm-dependent’ (Seidlhofer 2001: 138). As we saw in the previous section, ELF researchers, on the contrary, see the ‘E’ in ELF as a virtual language which is being spread and actualised in different ways (Widdowson 1997 in Seidlhofer 2001). Nevertheless, several scholars, such as Seidlhofer, Phillipson, etc. (cf. infra), share the idea that the globalization of English also entails the imposition of the Anglo-culture and values. English is then not considered to spread naturally, but distributed intentionally. In their views, the Native English nations imperialise the world linguistically.

1.2.1 The standard language ideology

Certain languages, [...], are believed by their speakers to exist in standardized forms, and this kind of belief affects the way in which speakers think about their own languages and about language in general.
(Milroy 2001: 530)

‘The standard language ideology’ entails that uniformity has been imposed on a certain language and that these standard forms are considered correct and functionally distributable. Most importantly, they are regarded as the prestige-variants of a language (Milroy 2001). The goal of standardization is, according to Milroy (2001: 535), socially, politically and commercially oriented. The prestige-variants are consequently not necessarily the most homogenous forms of language and the prestige is not to be found in the language features themselves, but in their speakers (Milroy 2001: 532). We can easily relate this to attitudes concerning ELF, where Jenkins (2007) found that many of the attitudes towards English as a lingua franca are based upon the social, political and cultural connotations that are attached to the English language in its native form, and that they were not reactions to the inherent linguistic features (Jenkins 2007: 187). Moreover, Jenkins calls the respondents of her survey “brainwashed by the prevailing standard NS [Native Speaker] English ideology” (Jenkins 2007: 187). In short, due to the standard language ideology, language users tend to see native English as ‘the best’ English. However, the effects of language ideologies are found in the ideas of linguists as well. Linguists are then often affected by the “falling standard myth” (a concept of Bolton 2003, in Jenkins 2007:...
This myth entails the conviction that every departure from a given standard is seen as a decline of those standards. ELF is thus seen as inferior to standard native English because it does not rely on it (Jenkins 2007).

As stated above, the standard forms of a language are seen as ‘correct’ and in consequence, other forms are considered ‘incorrect’ (Milroy 2001: 535). Milroy observes that this dichotomy is considered common sense, and that debating it is generally seen as pointless. The introduction of terms such as ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ in the discussion of standard languages seems to bring about moral implications, and language is thus seen as “a precious inheritance” (Milroy 2001: 537) that needs to be protected. The ‘protection’ of language entails language maintenance and gatekeeping, since “it is believed that if the canonical variety is not universally supported and protected, the language will inevitably decline and decay” (Milroy 2001: 537). This is similar to ‘the falling standard myth’ discussed above. The standard variety thus needs to be cleared from influence of non-standard forms, but by attaching prestige and value to a standard variety of language, other varieties become devalued (Milroy 2001). A non-native ‘variety’ such as the emerging ELF, is clearly illegitimate in the standard ideology-frame. This illegitimate status of ELF and its speakers is contested by the ELF researchers, as we have seen before. As Milroy (2001: 543) observes, the standard always remains “an idea in the mind”, but similarly, also so-called non-standard varieties can exist on an idealised level. We need to keep this in mind when discussing the possible codification of ELF. Milroy also comments on the relationship between this ideology and approaches towards language as abstract entities, devoid of society and language user.

In contrast with languages such as English, Spanish or French, not every language is a standard language. Milroy argues how we conceptualise language from a Western or Eurocentric point of view, and that linguistic theories are based on this perspective (Milroy 2001: 543). We are thus imposing a western view on languages that need not necessarily be regarded in this way. As an example, Milroy discusses the Pacific languages (2001: 543). Similarly, some scholars identify an Anglophone point of view forced upon the conceptualization of English as a global language. Such scholars believe that Anglophone values and culture are distributed together with the English language. This brings us to the question of linguistic imperialism.

1.2.2 Linguistic imperialism

The idea of linguistic imperialism is denounced by some, but fiercely emphasised by others. In the previous section, I briefly mentioned the views of Phillipson (2008) regarding the terminology of ELF. Phillipson comments on the asymmetrical nature of English as a lingua

10 As made clear in the first section of this chapter, the discussion on whether or not we can call ELF a variety is not settled yet
franca and argues that it cannot be seen as culturally neutral because it is also a native language for some speakers. He recognises the democratic side of ELF since it offers opportunities for many, but he adds that at the same time, it also puts other people in a disadvantaged position (Phillipson 2008). He further on discusses Global English in terms of ‘inclusive’ and ‘exclusive’, and as a language of “elite formation” (2008: 251). He even goes on to argue that

Global English is not a reality, however much it may be described as ‘the world’s lingua franca’, or ‘the lingua franca of the European Union’ – claims that are eminently falsifiable, but which serve to substantiate the processes of language hierarchisation (Phillipson 2008: 260; italics in original)

When we agree to use English worldwide and in numerous domains of society, according to Phillipson, we take part in the project of the US and the UK to establish English “as the language of power, globally and locally” (Phillipson 2008: 254).

Modiano (2009), who I have discussed previously as well, shares some ideas with Phillipson. He uses strong language and statements concerning Anglophone and Western domination in the world, but he also offers an alternative to this alleged imperialistic project of the US and the UK. In his own words, “mainland Europeans can and should oppose the domination of the Anglo-American sphere of influence” (Modiano 2009: 214). He hopes to break free from the colonial powers the nations have on mainland Europe and believes that a neutral English as a lingua franca in Europe is possible (Modiano 2009). In this way, Modiano takes a postcolonial view on English in Europe, as he believes that it can develop in the same way as the codified and standardised English varieties in Africa and Asia (Modiano 2009: 214). This assumed neutrality is not considered possible by Phillipson, and is also contested by Pennycook (1994). In the first chapter of his book, The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language, Pennycook explains why the spread of English, in his view, cannot be seen as “neutral, natural or beneficial” (1994: 23). He writes that if English is considered neutral, language is seen as a macro-system, hovering above social, cultural, political and economic contexts. Even more critically he warns against ignorance of “the relationships between English and inequitable distributions and flows of wealth, resources, culture and knowledge” (Pennycook 1994: 24).

Other scholars, on the contrary, challenge this way of thinking. According to MacKenzie (2009), the concept of ‘linguistic imperialism’ cannot be applied to the use of English in Europe, especially not to the use of English in scientific discourse. He claims that “the current use of the hegemonic language English may be seen as linguistic imperialism, but science itself [...] [is] scarcely awash with uniquely Anglophone forms and values” (2009: 226). House (2003) similarly does not agree with the imperialistic argument, because in her opinion (as explained in
section 1.1.4), English is used as a lingua franca for instrumental purposes, and thus does not form a threat against other languages or cultures. She voices a justified critique on emotional discussions “through such passe-partout derogative terms as (neo)imperialism and (neo)colonialism” (House 2003: 574; italics in original), which in my opinion is found in the account of Modiano (2009), discussed above. Jan Blommaert (2003) offers a similar argument. He focuses on the creative abilities of language users and therefore considers concepts as linguistic imperialism or ideas of “worldwide lingua-cultural homogenization” insufficient (2003: 611). Martin Dewey (2007: 336) also argues against the fear of homogenous conformity of culture. It is made clear by these latter scholars that we cannot take the idea of linguistic imperialism too far. It cannot be taken to the extent that it overrules both micro processes of language and the creativity of language users, or moreover, simplifies global processes. These last arguments seem to coincide with the previously discussed goals of ELF research.

Nonetheless, in some arguments of the research, an imperialistic undertone is noticed. In a recent article that was published in the Journal of English as a Lingua Franca, Seidlhofer clearly distinguishes between Anglo academics and Non-Anglo academics, the latter being disadvantaged and affected by “linguistic inequality” (2012: 394). The inequality between the academics, according to Seidlhofer, comes forth from the deeply rooted belief in a higher status for ENL (cf. The standard language ideology), but also from the Anglo-American dominance in multiple academic domains. She claims that in academic discourse, 'international' has almost become a synonym for 'Anglo-American', and that there is

an unspoken agreement, whether conscious or not, that the English that is used for international research activities is the same language that Anglo-Americans use intranationally, within their own speech communities, and that as rightful 'owners' of the language they can therefore legislate when English is used properly and when it is not.

(Seidlhofer 2012: 395 - 396)

Seidlhofer clearly combines several aspects of language ideologies which were mentioned in the beginning of this section. We thus note that language ideologies play an important role in the research of ELF. It could even be argued that the identification of the specific ideologies lies at the basis of the research. We cannot regard English in its global context without recognizing underlying tensions and processes, especially since it is ascertained that the ideologies affect linguists and language users equally. For the purpose of this dissertation however, this relatively short account of language ideologies should suffice.
1.3 Conclusion

In the first section of this chapter, I have made an attempt at giving an overview of research on English as a lingua franca from its start to where it stands now. I have given several definitions of ELF that are found in the literature and explained the complex relationship with other concepts such as English as a Foreign language (EFL) and English as an International language (EIL). In addition, some key issues can now be identified in the discussion of the pioneers in ELF research, Jennifer Jenkins and Barbara Seidlhofer. First, Jenkins and Seidlhofer claimed they were not posing a codified model for ELT or proposing to see ELF as a separate variety. In the reactions to the early research, however, we notice that this has not been clearly understood, since for example Mackenzie’s critique specifically goes against seeing ELF as a separate variety. But as Scheuer (2010) and MacKenzie (2009) argued, not only the opponents of Jenkins and Seidlhofer are to blame for every misunderstanding, since Jenkins and Seidlhofer also tend to contradict themselves. At the start of their research, Seidlhofer and Jenkins were mostly concerned with identifying particular features in ELF talk. This resulted in Seidlhofer's list of lexicogrammatical features and Jenkins' phonological 'lingua franca core'. We saw how Martin Dewey argued that this was inevitable when establishing a new area of research, and that the focus has shifted since then to identifying and analysing the underlying communicative processes. We have also noticed some other focus shifts in the research. I discussed how ELF should be seen as a fluid entity, and more importantly, completely bound up with processes of globalization. We had seen this argument earlier in the discussion of Haberland and Dewey. Also Firth and House offered a different perspective on ELF without discrediting the previous research of Jenkins and Seidlhofer. MacKenzie on the other hand, had a more negative attitude towards previous research, especially towards Jenkins. We have also seen how attitudes can be founded on deeply rooted language ideologies in the mind of both the linguist and the language user. Especially the standard language ideology is tackled by ELF, because it allows the use of 'non-standard' forms. Notwithstanding that researchers stress the difference between ELF and ENL from the inner-circle, the fear that the Anglophone culture will take over the world, through the distribution of English, is voiced in the argument of linguistic imperialism.

It is clear, as I have stated in the very beginning of this chapter, that the debate on the nature of ELF is not settled yet. The mere fact that the research on ELF is moving incredibly fast but at the same time is still very young, brings about much confusion. Jenkins et al. (2011) realise that this is one of the biggest problems for the acceptance of ELF, and the cause of many misconceptions concerning the nature of ELF itself and the goals of ELF research. However, they also concede that there are plenty of critics who fully understand what the concept entails and engage in constructive further research.
In the next chapter, I will introduce my own recorded ELF data and make clear why I am very much in favour of a more socially embedded approach to ELF, which takes all contexts of use into account, but also incorporates more than only linguistic features in evaluating language use. Accordingly, I am in line with the latest developments in ELF research, to which this dissertation aims to contribute. First, I explain the methodology that is applied in this dissertation and in the analysis of my data.
Chapter 2: Methodology and data analysis

2.1 Methodology

As mentioned in the introduction, the research in this dissertation draws on the conclusions of my bachelor paper. At the time of writing my bachelor paper, the concept of ELF was completely new to me, and my approach was basically data-driven. I had no specific hypothesis in mind. In the present dissertation, I mostly rely on the same data that I recorded for my bachelor paper. Notwithstanding that I was already familiar with the data, and that I wanted to focus on difficulties in ELF, I started my analysis completely unbiased. I did not want to search for anything in particular because that would make me overlook other interesting or remarkable features in the data.

I collected the data in the period of November – December 2011. I recorded 8 interviews, all between 10 minutes and 1 hour long. They were all interviews between a social worker and one or more clients at Transithuis in Ghent, which is part of a larger organisation, CAW Artevelde. Because my mother works in another service of the organisation, she could introduce me and I was allowed to record the conversations. For the purpose of this dissertation, I decided to record three more interviews in April 2013. It had been over a year since I visited Transithuis, and I found it useful to revisit the research setting, especially since I wanted to focus on the influence of contextual factors on the language use in the data.

Transithuis gives assistance to foreigners in Belgium. The cases are very diverse, going from people who are illegally in the country and want to obtain the Belgian nationality, to people who need administrative help. Sometimes Transithuis also provides judicial assistance. At certain moments during the week, people are free to come to Transithuis, without an appointment. When a client is already familiar with the organisation, they can call to make an appointment. I was allowed to observe and record some of those interviews that were scheduled in advance. This means that most of the interviewees were already familiarised with the procedures and Transithuis itself because it was not their first visit. Still, this familiarity with the organisation was no guarantee for smooth and effective communication. The proficiency of the clients in spoken English differed greatly, as did the proficiency of the social workers.

I have not used all my recorded data, due to the limited space and scope of this research paper. I analysed two recordings which I also analysed for my bachelor paper, and one new recording from April 2013. These recordings all showed difficulties in the use of ELF that were related to the context of Transithuis. All the social workers are Flemish, but the origins of the clients are more diverse. The interviews took place in the office of the social workers, except for the group visit, which was organised in the waiting room of Transithuis. I was present during
every interview. Before every recording, the permission of the client was asked, and luckily none of them had a problem with my presence. During the recordings, the participants paid little attention to me and I was just a bystander.

I transcribed the interviews and looked for remarkable utterances or communicative choices. I used very basic symbols for the transcriptions. The following features are transcribed: pauses (.), repetition or hesitation, increased pitch (CAPITAL LETTERS), speech overlap (==) and unintelligible speech (xxx). Laughter and meta-comments are transcribed between double brackets. The most important parts of the transcriptions, on which will be focused in the analysis, are put in bold. All Dutch utterances are in italics and are translated between brackets or in a footnote.

After making some initial, intuitive, generalisations and an extensive micro-analysis of the selected data, I chose to focus on three main influential contextual features in the data. In my opinion, these are characteristic of the interaction at Transithuis and make this setting differ from previously researched settings. Before analysing the data, I explain the difference between this research setting and contexts of existing ELF research in more detail.

2.2 Framing the data

Following Dewey's claim for a "reconnection to the social world" (Dewey 2009: 69), we need to consider English as a lingua franca as something that comes about in social interaction. It has been argued that "English is [...] a globalized phenomenon that is continuously being localized during its countless interactions" (Jenkins et al. 2011: 304). However, we cannot only focus on the localised language features. Pennycook (1994) argues for a compromise between structuralist and materialist view on language (cf. supra): also the contextual features that influence the language use need to be integrated in research. Hence, the starting point of research concerning ELF should lie with the specific situations in which ELF emerges. Research is thus completely situated within the social frame of reference, and moreover, findings are grounded in social reality. It is therefore crucial for the further development of this paper to keep also the following statement by Pennycook in mind: "language can never be removed from its social, cultural, political and discursive contexts" (1994: 33).

ELF research is moving very quickly, and as such, this claim is also repeatedly voiced in the newest edition of the Journal of English as a Lingua Franca (see Mortensen 2013 and Gal 2013). As I have briefly touched upon in my bachelor paper, previous research in ELF is often concerned with more or less uniform contexts of use, such as encounters between students in exchange programs. Consequently, the results from research on these interactions will also be unvarying. As we have seen in the first chapter, this problem has also been recognised by Firth
Moreover, there has not been much attention for others factors that come into play in ELF interactions than the language itself. It has to be acknowledged however that several specific research areas exist, for example the research on the use of ELF in Academic contexts (see research by Anna Mauranen, e.g. 2006). The VOICE corpus also incorporates the following speech event types: interviews, press conferences, service encounters, seminar discussions, working group discussions, workshop discussions, meetings, panels, question-answer-sessions and conversations. These interactions are made available to researchers around the world for analysis and discussion (Univie.ac.at/voice). Nevertheless, I see a recurrent use of the same data and examples in the literature (for example in Seidlhofer 2011).

Jenkins et al (2011) observe how research on ELF is increasingly being carried out in specific domains, and how scholars explore implications of ELF in those particular settings. They give an overview of the main settings in which ELF research has been conducted, namely, ELF in business settings and ELF in academic settings (Jenkins et al. 2011: 298 - 302). In the former domain, researchers paid attention to the competition between English and other languages, and specialised language and knowledge (Jenkins et al. 2011: 298). In research on the use of ELF in academic contexts, several specific features have been identified in this setting that are different from the more "general ELF" (Jenkins et al. 2011: 300). For example, a recent publication shows how ELF users in an academic setting increasingly make use of vague expressions such as and so on, so to say, etc. (Metsä-Ketelä 2013).

The predominant focus of ELF research is on the way non-native speakers accommodate to each other and use ELF as a successful medium of communication. Non-native speakers cannot always rely on their ‘inner competence’. This causes them to assess the competence level of their interlocutor and adjust their own language use if necessary. ELF thus seems to be fairly democratic, and the focus is clearly on collaboration. ELF users are perhaps better prepared to anticipate possible communication problems, because they enter the interaction with a medium with which they are not one hundred percent familiar. This latter claim is voiced by many ELF researchers (see for example Mauranen 2006), and is seen as cause for the lack of misunderstanding in ELF communication. To overcome possible misunderstanding, ELF users engage in accommodation strategies. They have to come up with other ways to express themselves if they cannot find the right words, or adjust their overall language use. This was seen in the exemplary extracts in the first chapter which showed communicative strategies of competent ELF users. In my bachelor paper I also demonstrated this with an extensive analysis of several extracts. I identified successful repair-strategies, code-switches or creative translations of organization-specific terminology in the data. These findings correspond to the conclusions of a lot of other research in ELF, for example Mauranen 2006, Cogo 2009 and Klimpfinger 2007. It seems to be the case that all of the above comes quite naturally or
spontaneously for the ELF user. Research has shown that all of these features, and more, are recurrent in ELF communication (see Literature review). Different from existing ELF research however, is the specific setting in which I collected my data. This setting caused me to draw some other conclusions as well.

The conversations at Transithuis are different from the majority of ELF talk that is analysed and used in research. The content of the interviews is highly sensitive, as it often concerns detailed information about the client’s past, present and future. What is most important, the correct transfer of the right information is crucial for the client and directly influences his or her well-being. In addition, the nature of the relationship between the participants is not straightforward in a setting like Transithuis. The knowledge that the client has of the structure of a public service encounter, specifically in Transithuis, cannot be taken for granted. This can be related to the conventional interpretation of “Goffman’s [...] concept of ‘frame’ [which is] often defined in terms of a ‘frame of reference’ or the schematic knowledge which language users possess about the organization of an event or activity” (Slembrouck 2010: 25). The difference in schematic knowledge brings about different expectations. This puts the social worker in a more ‘powerful’ position, in that he/she leads the conversation and is more at ease because of the considerable experience with these encounters. The client, on the other hand, is completely dependent on the social worker since he/she has the information to assist the client. Nevertheless in the examples below, we will see how this relationship is not fixed and how the social worker often shifts alignment during the same interaction. To relate this again to Goffman, I apply the concept of ‘footing’. According to Slembrouck (2010), we should understand footing as a way in which interlocutors are positioned towards each other, but also how they actively reposition themselves during the interaction (Slembrouck 2010: 42). Moreover, “a shift in footing can affect prior status and social distance arrangements among interlocutors. Some shifts are momentary suspensions of social relations that are later resumed” (Wine 2008: 2). Accordingly, in the examples below, we will see how a social worker at times shifts out of her role as provider of formal administrative information and actively repositions herself to a closer alignment with the client to try and find a solution to his problem. In this aspect, the interaction at Transithuis also differs from other institutional immigration encounters, for example the more formal, official interviews that are conducted in the asylum procedure (see research by Guido 2012). Consequently, we need to be careful in generalizing ‘speech event types’.

2.3 Data analysis

All the factors above need to be taken into account when analyzing and evaluating the interactions in a setting like Transithuis. I argue that when evaluating people’s language skills and, specifically, the English proficiency of ELF speakers, we need to consider the specific
context in which the interactions take place. In my bachelor paper I have already stated that, while acknowledging the legitimacy of the ELF users, we still need to be critical towards poor levels of proficiency, especially if this brings the successful transfer of crucial information at risk.

In what follows, I elaborate on these arguments and substantiate the above findings more thoroughly. I return to some interactions which I discussed in my bachelor paper, but also add some new extracts. I provide an extensive analysis, in which I comment on several successful, but also less successful communicative choices. Many questions will arise from this analysis: Would the help of an interpreter be helpful? Does the social worker need more English training? And if so, what kind of English? And how about the clients? I align myself with the leading ELF research discussed in chapter one, by agreeing that focusing exclusively on improving English language skills in native speaker terms is not desirable and instead, training in multilingual and multicultural awareness would probably be more helpful. However, I argue that, before this is possible, a certain level of proficiency in the language needs to be achieved. It is not possible to use language in a creative way and make it ‘your own’, without some competence in that language. The idea that some interactants lack a level of competence to engage in ELF communication is insufficiently addressed in the literature.

In general, I deduct three main difficulties in the lingua franca communication within the setting of Transithuis. Firstly, the participants do not always have the same conversational goal in mind, which is a consequence of the different expectations with which they enter the interaction. Secondly, the complex information and terminology can be very difficult to deal with in ELF, and thirdly, sometimes the discrepancy between the levels of competence of the interactants is too great to overcome. I see this as a contextual factor, because it is a consequence of the enormous diversity of clients that visit Transithuis.

As made clear in the first chapter, there has been a shift in focus within ELF research, away from the individual language features towards the more general strategies underneath. However, Seidlhofer (2011: 101) still remains focused on each separate turn on its own in a conversation, for example when discussing word innovation as an accommodation strategy to enhance clarity. Accordingly, Seidlhofer still takes a particular lexicogrammatical or pragmatic feature as the starting point to subsequently investigate the underlying communicative processes. When discussing my own recorded data, I would like to focus more on the interaction as a whole and less on the use of particular words or phrases. I will provide an extensive, detailed analysis of three different examples, which exemplify the more general issues mentioned above. As I draw attention to contextual factors that influence the communicative outcome of the interaction, I will discuss them within the specific framework of Transithuis. In addition, I will repeatedly relate them back to the specific interaction from which they are taken.
2.3.1 Lack of orientation towards a common conversational goal

The first extract I want to discuss comes from an encounter in which a social worker introduces a group of foreigners to Transithuis. The introduction lasts half an hour and its purpose is to explain the main functions of Transithuis and make sure the visitors know what kind of help they can expect when coming to the organization. One social worker (SW) gave the entire introduction in English, although an interpreter was actually there, provided by the person responsible for the group. Except for the social worker, the group leader and of course the interpreter, no other participant could speak or understand Dutch. The communication between the social worker and the clients is in ELF, but it may not have been the optimal choice for the social worker to give the entire introduction in English herself. Arguably, despite some obvious successful sub-interactions between the SW and the clients, the less successful moments of interaction are due to a lack of English proficiency, of both the social worker and the clients. It is however not said that the communicative difficulties would be overcome by the help of the interpreter. We have to consider that the introduction is given to a heterogeneous group of people with different linguistic backgrounds. Consequently, the interpreter would have to switch between Dutch and English. This differs from a ‘normal’ interpreting job, where every party would be able to speak his/her own mother language. Despite the use of an interpreter, the clients would still not be able to express themselves in any of their first languages. The interpreter would thus only benefit the social worker. Moreover, the interpreter will probably be able to translate the explanation of the SW fluently and coherently, but most likely, she will also do this conform to ENL norms. This is not the norm that is most beneficent for the clients, who are not native speakers of English, but use English as a lingua franca. Furthermore, the use of an interpreter is very time-consuming, which is often an important factor to consider for the social workers. One social worker also told me how important she finds it to be able to communicate directly with the client.

Apart from the question of which English is to be used, either ELF for interaction between social worker and clients or ENL by the interpreter (or, more correctly EFL, because she is not a native speaker herself), it remains crucial to consider the specific context of Transithuis, as I discussed above. Some of the clients have been to the organization before, but most of them have not. Consequently, not everyone knows what to expect when they arrive at the organization. In addition, the clients at Transithuis have to deal with great problems, which affect their entire life and well-being. Misunderstandings or communicative breakdowns therefore have an enormous impact and it can cause severe problems for the client if he or she does not get the correct information. Let us take a look at the following extract to make this more concrete.
The initial question of the client in this example, right before the beginning of this extract, was what people can do if they are out on the street and simply have nowhere to go, no place to sleep or stay. The social worker explains that in that case they can stay at nachtopvang (lit. night shelter) for five nights every two weeks. But, in order to do so, they have to make a reservation for the first night. To make the reservation the client has to come to Transithuis, or the onthaal (lit. reception\footnote{Reception is the ENL translation of onthaal, but translating it this way could cause confusion. Onthaal is the name of a separate branch of CAW Artevelde which does intake interviews with a wide range of clients. Contrary to Transithuis, which focuses on foreigners, regularization and other administrative procedures, onthaal offers all sorts of assistance. It is not the reception desk which you pass when entering the CAW building.}), which is another part of the encompassing organization CAW Artevelde. In my bachelor paper I discussed the implications these unflagged code-switches could have for the client’s full understanding.

After the explanation the SW asks “is it clearly?”, and the client answers this positively so we assume that he has understood what he can do if he finds himself in this situation. However, the client feels the need to elaborate and tells the social worker why he asked this particular question.

Extract 3

1) C: yes yes just I ask because I am yet in procedure but I am afraid because maybe they put in street like somebody else
2) SW: ja
3) C: because a lot of people now are in street and .. for that I ask because I am also afraid
4) SW: yes
5) C: because Belgium give negative and when we go they have problem in my country for example I have problem I don't want to go in my country I know what is my problem they say give negative because somebody from a minister of euh the minister come from war countries say in brussel that there is no problem because he euh take them sanction from brussel because he said you must change this minister and they are all together=
6) SW: =hmhm=
7) C: =in one party
8) SW: ja
9) C: and they say that everything is going ok there with police and they don't say that police hit people or xxx
10) SW: Ok ok dit is your situation eh
11) C: Yes and=
12) SW: =yes=
13) C: =And I wan don’t want to go back in my country
14) SW: =hmhm=
15) C: = I want to stay in Europe Belgium give me negative if I go now in frank.rijk or somewhere else=
16) SW: =You cannot you cannot hel
17) C: I have fingers regu send me back again here why=
18) SW: Yes this is a problem from from=
19) C: =Why don’t you don’t euh said you I don’t want you to stay here go in another country why they ask it again send less people here
20) SW: Yes but this is another this is are other question eh this are eh peli political questions eh
21) C: No no politic I is no politic
22) SW: No this this his an individual euh I euh it’s not the moment to==
23) C: ==You have problem you are afraid to get in a conflict

We notice that both of the participants have good intentions and it cannot be said that one of them is trying to inhibit the communication. What is however lacking between them is an orientation towards a common consensus or goal, which has been repeatedly emphasised as a typical feature of ELF interaction (See for example Seidlhofer 2001: 143). In the interactions at Transithuis however, this is not a given. As I stated above, not all the clients are acquainted with the organization and some of them do not know what to expect. In this interaction, the social worker’s task is to give a brief introduction to Transithuis and the clients are there to listen, but they are also in a position to ask questions. Each member of the group of clients finds him/herself in a particular, difficult situation which they are eager to explain. It is therefore clear why the client in this extract wants to tell the social worker about his particular condition since he is afraid and in need of immediate help. The SW finds herself in a difficult position at the moment, because she needs to continue, but does not want to offend the client. The relationship between the clients and the SW is not straightforward, but rather ambiguous at times. Transithuis mostly gives administrative help to foreigners and there is not always time to elaborate on the client’s particular story. Especially if we consider that almost every morning, the social workers at Transithuis receive eight or nine people. Turn 10 and 11 in the above extract, show how the different expectations and goals of the client and the social worker clash and how difficult this is to deal with. Besides the different expectations that are displayed in this example, the particular extract is also exemplary of the sensitive, personal and emotional matters that the social workers have to deal with and of the difficult situations the clients find themselves in.
The use of English is a complicating factor here. In turn 5, the client expresses himself very incoherently. We see how the social worker tries to interrupt the client (turn 10), by saying 'ok ok dit is your situation eh'. She uses an expression that for her implies a polite interruption, but she does not succeed in getting this across. On the contrary, the client interprets this as an encouragement to continue. Her second attempt is also interpreted differently (turn 20). It seems that the client interprets this as if the SW is saying that there is no place for 'political matters' or 'discussions about politics'.

In the next extract, we also see the difficult role of the social worker displayed. In addition, we notice how the organization-specific terminology is difficult to deal with in English, for both the social worker and the client. Moreover, applying accommodation strategies seems not to be self-evident, even though this is often presented as such in the literature (see Seidlhofer 2011 and Cogo 2009).

2.3.2 Complex information and ambiguous (use of) words

The following extract comes from an interview with a Thai man. In my bachelor paper I included some examples from this same conversation to point out effective communicative strategies that were used by both the social worker and the client. Some of those examples were also used in the first chapter of this research paper. The overall content of the interview, however, was very complex. In the beginning of the interview the social worker remarked that the question of the client was new to her. The client's new working card was denied because the company for which he works should find a European employee for this job. In order to be able to stay in Belgium and do the job he wants, he has to obtain the Belgian nationality. In the extract below, the client is desperate to find a way to have a legal stay in Belgium after the social worker has told him that he does not have many options left. The man has heard of something called 'samenwonen' (lit. living together), and he asks for further information.

Extract 4

1) SW: so I'm very afraid that euh . it will not work out like you want=
2) C: =Yeah I know that's why have I tried to find
3) SW: =Yes
4) C: Another way to euh to live here
5) SW: Yes but there is no other way unless you have a Belgian partner or
6) C: Like euh samenwonen ?=
7) SW: =Yes you have a Belgian p partner or euh you live alone?
8) C: no but euh . my friend want to help me to like euh to do samenwonen ?
9) SW: Yes
10) C: But I don't know how to do it
11) SW: Ah but you know each other a long time or
12) C: Yes but we don't live together
13) SW: Yeah but that's ok euh
14) C: Cause she live in brussel
15) SW: Yes and but you really need to have a serious relationship eh, only then it can work
   eh. It's not just two friends living together can have papers.. If you understand what I
   mean
16) C: Yeah
17) SW: A marriage or all partnership is almost the same. It's like an euhm an engagement
   eh. It's like you do an engagement to live together to be responsible for each other to
   share your wage=
18) C: = yea h but now bec. I we don't use the same address. She live in brussel she have her
   own address. And I have my own address in Ghent=
19) SW: = Mhm. But you have you have a long. a relationship
20) C: =Yes we know each other 5 or 6 years
21) SW: = ah
22) C: = since I live here
23) SW: And euhm yes and you want to start a family or really want to start make it
   serious or
24) C: No just friends. My close friends. Like my sister
25) SW: Yes but you cannot do
26) C: She like my sister

In Belgium, couples can sign a contract to live together officially, in which they declare specific
conditions for cohabitation. A person who lives illegally in Belgium can sign this contract, if
he/she has a relationship with someone with the Belgian nationality. On the basis of that
contract, the person can ask regularization, as a kind of family reunion. Before this person can
get regularization, an investigation is carried out to confirm whether the couple really lives
together or not, and whether they really have a relationship, similar to an investigation of
marriages of convenience (Belgium.be). In Dutch this contract is called a ‘samenvoudingscontract’
and when I look this up in a dictionary, I get the following translations: “partnership contract,
living together contract, cohabitation contract (for unmarried couples)”.12

First of all, the translation of these different concepts is not at all easy for the social
worker if she wants to explain any of them. In this example however, she immediately knows

12 Van Dale Groot woordenboek Nederlands-Engels (2008: 1601)
what the client is talking about since he, proficiently, switches codes and uses the Dutch concept
*samenwonen* (for the first time in turn 6). However, the way in which he applies the terminology
(turn 8: 'to do *samenwonen*') implies that in his mind, the concept *samenwonen* has a very
pragmatic content. He sees it as a way to obtain the Belgian nationality, and not *samenwonen* as
a goal on its own (i.e. living together with his partner). This is even more clear further on in the
interview, when the client repeatedly asks whether he has to stay in the same apartment with
his friend at all times, because he does not want to bother her too much. The social worker
seems to pick this up, as she engages in a long discussion on the nature of the client's
relationship with his friend. She fulfils two roles in one at this moment. She tries to explain to the
client that *samenwonen* is not something that you just 'do', but that it needs to involve a 'serious
relationship' (turn 15). Here, she seems to give very personal advice to the client and tries to
explain to him the full meaning of *samenwonen*, namely, the act of living together without any
administrative aspects. In the same turn however, she returns to being of administrative help,
through a subtle shift in footing, in which she seems to distance herself from the idea of 'to do
*samenwonen*', just for the sake of regularization.

We see that the different concepts applied by the SW are ambiguous and that she has
difficulties in providing the client with a clear explanation. She uses synonyms and rephrases
what she means several times, for example when she tries to explain *'samenwonen' in
administrative terms and uses concepts like 'partnership' and 'engagement'. The SW clearly does
not lack proficiency in applying different communicative strategies, but in this case, the different
descriptions make it all more complex, especially for the client, whose English proficiency is
rather low. She uses words that, according to her, have clear connotations attached to it (for
example: 'a serious relationship', 'partner', 'relationship'), but this is not necessarily the case for
the client, as is clear from the above extract. Consequently, we can identify several
straightforward misunderstandings that come about. Only when the phrase 'to start a family' is
spoken, which unambiguously entails the connotation of a sexual relationship, the
misunderstandings are resolved, and the SW realises that the friend is not his lover. This is then
again emphasised by the client by stating that his friend is like his sister. If we consider this last
utterance, it is clear that the SW probably should have been more explicit in what she meant.
After all, a friend that you consider your sister, is also someone you have known for a long time,
you also have a relationship with this person and this relationship can be serious.

The problem in this interview seems to be the complex content of information that needs
to be transferred. The entire recording lasts one hour and eleven minutes, and it took at least
half of that time to discuss the matter of *'samenwonen'*. Unlike the previous example, from the
introduction session (extract 3), we can identify an orientation towards a common goal. The
participants are both oriented to explain and understand the procedure of *'samenwonen'*, or
more generally, to find a way for the client to stay legally in the country and not to be sent back, but still, the message does not get across easily. This is caused by the low English proficiency of the client, although he compensates for this lacking proficiency by using the Dutch term ‘samenwonen’ in the beginning of the extract. The client thus uses the code-switch “as an additional resource to achieve particular conversational goals in interactions with other intercultural speakers” (Cogo 2009: 268). Mostly however, in this particular extract, we can see how the ELF users attach different meanings or connotations to the same English words. We see that the participants do not always question their own understanding of a concept or phrase and disregard the possibility that the interlocutor may not interpret this similarly. This was also the case in the first example where the SW tried to interrupt her client. If ELF users are not explicit enough in what they mean with a specific word or concept (in this case ‘partner’ or ‘relationship’), misunderstandings and confusion come about. The above extract thus questions the validity of statements that ELF interactants “[overcome] linguistic and cultural barriers in the situation [by promoting] communicative clarity by making utterances more explicit” (Mauranen 2007, cited in Cogo 2009: 257). The effectiveness of accommodation strategies is also questioned in the last example that I discuss.

2.3.3 Successful accommodation strategies with a less successful communicative outcome

The third example is taken from an interview between a social worker at Transithuis and a Syrian, recorded in April 2013. In the beginning of the interview he explains that he is currently waiting to be invited for his second interview at the Office of the Commissioner General For Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS). When he enters the office at Transithuis, the man is speaking English. The social worker asks him permission for my recording, but he does not understand the question. Because he does not even understand the first thing the social worker says, and he speaks Arabic to the boy who accompanies him, she tells him he is in need of an Arabic interpreter. The client denies this and continues to try and speak English. Coincidentally, an intern (INT), who speaks Arabic fluently, is working at a separate desk in the same room. Therefore, in the beginning, but also during the interview, the client turns to her for help if he does not understand the social worker fully. Hence, ELF falls short as a medium of communication. At the start of the interview the English proficiency of the client seems to suffice and basic information about the client’s state of being and history can be transferred, as can be seen in the following extract.

**Extract 5**

1) SW: Ok so what is. How can I help you?
2) C: How you can help me? I don’t have anything. I don’t have eat. I don’t have a place.
3) SW: no =
4) C: =I don’t have anything here you know. And now I wait the euh second euh interview you know
5) SW: =Ah yes
6) C: And I don’t know what I can do you know
7) SW: =mhm and euhm
8) C: Maybe sometime I sleep without eat you know=
9) SW: =And where which were did you where were you born? In which=
10) C: =Euh here?
11) SW: in where were you born?
12) C: Euh euh I born in Syria

Although the client uses unidiomatic and ungrammatical phrases such as ‘I don’t have eat’ (turn 2) and ‘maybe sometime I sleep without eat you know’ (turn 8), he is understood by the social worker. More importantly, the client does not lose face. However, further on in the interview, the limited English proficiency of the client becomes a problem. We should note here that the social worker has experience in dealing with different levels of English, and is not a native-speaker herself. She does her best to make everything as clear as possible for the client. Let us take a look at the following extract from the interview:

Extract 6

1)SW: You went back to where? To Syria?
2)C: No to Jordan
3)SW: I see
4)C: Uhu. And I then I stay stay after when you see this in Syria .
5) SW: hmh
6)C: I back here
7) SW: Euhm but and when did y when did you live in Syria?
8) C: I live in Syria==
9) SW: ==When when==
10) C: =When
11) SW: When . Which period of your life did you live in Syria?
12) C: Name the place?
13) SW: No when. What period what year?
14) C: All all all time
15) SW: You were born no==
In turn 7, the social worker asks a basic question: ‘when did you live in Syria?’. In the response of the client, it is clear that he does not understand this question. The social worker picks this up and engages in different communicative strategies to try and get a successful conversational outcome. First, she repeats the word (turn 9). The client repeats the word as well (turn 10), but he still does not know how to answer the social worker’s question. Next, the social worker applies a different strategy; she rephrases her question to ‘which period of your life did you live in Syria?’ (turn 11). The client responds with a question, as he wants to ascertain whether he has understood her this time. It is however not clear how the client inferred this content from the question in turn 11. It seems strange that he does not know the word ‘when’, but does know a phrase like ‘name the place’. In any case, he does not seem to understand the question or its relevance. Finally, the social worker repeats what she has said, for the third time: ‘No when what period’, and adds a third possibility at the end: ‘what year’ (turn 13). The specific time-related word ‘year’ leads the client to respond with ‘all time’. The client thus seems to imply that he has lived in Syria his entire life, and it is repeated again that he is born in Syria, even though this was already established in the beginning of the interview (see extract 5 above). But, he has not always lived in Syria, he even says this explicitly in the beginning of this extract: he went back to Jordan after a stay in Belgium eight or nine years ago. Can we be sure that he understood the question of the social worker, even though he gives an acceptable answer? This could have great implications for the client, since, in the continuation of the asylum procedure, he will be expected to give a detailed account of when he lived where exactly. Consequently, he may also require the assistance of an interpreter during his asylum interview, for his own benefit. Especially because, as I mentioned before, he repeatedly relies on the help of the intern who happened to be in the same room. An example of this can be seen in the next extract.

The client has applied for asylum and is now waiting to be invited for the interview at the CGRS, but he has heard that the waiting period could be up to one year or more. To verify this, the social worker calls the CGRS for further information. They tell her that it is indeed possible that the client will have to wait for a year, because there are currently many applications from this particular region. She tries to explain this, but also informs the client that he can ask to speed up his procedure. She additionally explains that, before this is possible, the client needs to come up with a valid reason. Again, the social worker uses different strategies to make this clear for the client.
Extract 7

1) SW: ja it's true that it can take a long time. Because many people ask asylum who are from Syria so that's euhm. And since euh. It's always one. part of the commissariaat 13 who does the interviews. They do the Middle-East section they do that. So it can take. They don’t. cannot say how long but euhm. And euhm. So it can take a year maybe. But euh if you want you can ask for to have a euhm. Quick euhm. That they ask that they take your euhm. demand for asylum before other ones . but you have you need to be . euh. You have to have a motivation. You need to say why.

2) C: Uhu

3) SW: So what can you say

4) C: Nothing what I can say

5) SW: Why you are more why yours is more urgent that other ones ?

6) C: I don't understand

7) SW: So you can say yeah I want to have an interview soon for this reason. Wha wh why? For instance I don’t know. Give me an example I don’t know . euh yeah you don’t have a place to stay. But then they will say yeah you can go to a centre. So I don't know which reason you can s give

8) C: Ss I don't understand you.

9) SW: Ah==

10) C: ((addressing INT)) ==xxx((Arabic))xxx=

11) SW: ((addressing INT)) Ja wil jij nog eens. Het is zo dat je hij kan vragen voor een versnelling van de procedure maar dan moet hij een goeie motivatie hebben en ik weet niet welke motivatie dat hij kan14=

12) INT: ==xxx((Arabic))xxx==

13) SW: ==aangeven15==

14) INT: ==xxx((Arabic))xxxx

15) C: ==xxx((Arabic))xxxx

16) INT: Is that for commissariaat==?

17) SW: ==Commissariaat ja

18) INT: Xxx((Arabic))xx

19) SW: So the commissariaat has a lot of work because many people from Syria ask asylum so they are waiting for the interview. So it will maybe take one year ==

13 The commission ((refers to the CGRS))

14 Yes, would you like to. He can ask for an acceleration of the procedure, but he needs to have a good motivation and I don’t know which motivation he can=

15 Give
20) C: ==xxx((Arabic))xxx
21) SW: mhm
22) INT: Said euh the situation wha where he is euh is enough for him to. so he cannot say
23) SW: No that's not a good reason

The social worker applies several strategies, but in vain. Firstly, she gives a basic explanation of the situation. We see here how she searches for other words if she does not know a specific phrase herself, comparable to extract 4. In the first turn, she does not use ‘to accelerate’ or ‘to speed up’, because she probably cannot come up with those, but searches for other expressions that equally express what she wants to say. She also rephrases some expressions for the benefit of the client, through which she wants to avoid misunderstandings. Accordingly, paraphrasing is not only an accommodation strategy, but also a “preemptive [measure]” (Kaur 2011: 98) to anticipate potential misunderstanding. For example, at the end of her turn she uses both ‘You have to have a motivation’ and ‘you need to say why’. The client does not respond immediately, which implies that he probably has not understood what the social worker told him. When she asks him the direct question ‘so what can you say’ (turn 3), the client seems to interpret this as an idiomatic, rhetorical expression and he answers with ‘nothing what I can say’ (turn 4), as if he means that there is nothing left to say or that he does not have any words left for this situation. It is thus clear that he has not understood the explanation that preceded the social worker’s question in turn 3. Again comparable to extract 4, the SW also contributes to the non-understanding of the client because she elaborates on detailed information about the CGRS and is not explicit enough or does not come to the point fast enough. The social worker then rephrases her question to ‘why yours is more urgent than other ones?’ after which the client explicitly states that he does not understand her. Next, the social worker tries to give a more elaborate explanation by using an example, but by translating her own train of thoughts immediately in English (turn 7), she makes it unnecessarily complex and confusing for the client. We see how she shifts alignment and takes on the perspective of the client as she tries to search for a solution together with him. The client, however, repeats that he does not understand her and before the social worker can answer him, he has already started to speak Arabic to the intern. In turn 11 the social worker admits that English cannot be used as a lingua franca here anymore by asking the intern to interpret. In turn 19, she tries once more to explain the situation in English, just keeping to the basic information, namely that he will probably have to wait for more than one year. The client interrupts this and continues to speak Arabic to the intern. The intern translates everything the client has said into one sentence, essentially saying that the client cannot give a motivation because for him his particular situation is a valid reason on its own.
In this interview, we notice how English does not suffice as a medium of communication between these non-native speakers. A distinction can clearly be made between proficient and less proficient ELF users. A basic observation that is often made in ELF conversations, is that participants tend to accommodate towards the lowest level of competence present. This is what the social worker in this extract tries to do, as she tries to rephrase or find a synonym if she cannot come up with a specific word. This was also the case in extract 4. However, her communicative strategies were only scarcely successful, while in other interviews, they would have functioned more effectively, if the levels of proficiency between the ELF users was more alike. However, the low English proficiency of the client, makes the situation and the interaction even more complex. In this particular example, English does not function as a successful lingua franca.

2.3.4 Conclusion

Several issues come forward in the analysis of the above extracts. It is clear that English cannot always serve as a reliable resource for the transfer of complex factual information, as I already concluded in my bachelor paper. The problematic features are completely bound up with the specific setting in which the interactions took place, where the language use is more restricted and asks for a more critical evaluation. But, as English also plays an important role in settings like Transithuis, these contexts cannot be disregarded in research on ELF.

It is clear that misunderstandings have greater impact in these settings than in other contexts. Also the relationship between the different participants is much more complex. Not all participants are equally familiar with the organization or with the type of interaction that they are engaged in. This was clear in extract 3, where the participants entered the conversation with different expectations, which ultimately led to a disagreement between them. In extract 4, we saw how the expectations were similar and a common goal was recognised, but the information was too complex and the English proficiency of the client and the SW too limited. Consequently, they had to engage in extensive negotiation of meaning. Extracts 5, 6 and 7 showed us a mixture of both problems. The client claimed to speak English, but his English was not sufficient, even not for lingua franca communication. The SW did her best to accommodate, successfully sometimes, but at other times she failed to leave out unnecessary information or engaged in too complex explanations. At times, evaluation of language and judgment on proficiency does have a place within ELF interactions and English as a lingua franca needs to be evaluated according to the specific context of use. That is why I have not focused on the particular grammatical forms that were used in the ELF talk in my data, but tried to emphasise the more general communicative choices and how they function within the specific framework of Transithuis. In the next chapter, I will discuss these arguments and findings in relation to literature on ELF,
which entails both previous research that was introduced in chapter 1, and current ongoing research on ELF.
Chapter 3: Discussion

In the first chapter of this dissertation, it was made clear that the latest developments in ELF research entail a reconceptualisation of the concept ‘ELF’ itself. Proposals are made to see ELF as a fluid entity, bound up with processes of globalization (see Dewey 2007) and ELF is no longer seen as a uniform variety (Jenkins et al. 2011). With the analysis of the data I collected at Transithuis and the findings of my bachelor paper in mind, I would like to take this conceptualisation a step further in this chapter. I argue that to fully understand the complexity of the ELF phenomenon, we should take more than just linguistic factors in mind, but account for the differences in language use by looking extensively at contextual factors as well. Thus, it will become clear that not all ELF interaction can be evaluated similarly. With this approach, I align myself with several contributions in the latest edition of the *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca* (Volume 2, Issue 1, March 2013).

The predominant focus of ELF research has been on the unproblematic and creative side of English as a lingua franca. Several researchers have found that misunderstandings are scarce in ELF communication (see for example Mauranen 2006, Kaur 2011): the ELF users cope with them very creatively and use different communicative strategies to either prevent or overcome the misunderstandings. Part of my data corroborate their findings. In my bachelor paper I drew attention to successful instances of ELF talk at Transithuis and in the previous chapter, we saw how participants proficiently drew from their multilingual repertoire to ensure mutual understanding. However, we also saw instances where mutual understanding was not always easy to achieve. So on the one hand, some of my observations coincide with previous research on ELF, such as the role of code-switching, researched by Theresa Klimpfinger (2007). On the other hand, I draw attention to some problematic features of ELF interactions, namely features that can have greater implications in this specific contexts of use. Hence, the claim that “the problem of misunderstanding [in ELF interaction] is far from critical” (Kaur 2011: 97), because “open or overt misunderstandings” (Ibid.) are scarce and dealt with successfully, needs to be reconsidered. Even Barbara Seidlhofer admits this gap in ELF research at times: “throughout this book [i.e. *Understanding English as a lingua franca*], I focus on the positive features of ELF, but […], it has its problematic features and here too there is a need for description” (Seidlhofer 2011: 49). With this approach, I want to emphasise that not every ELF usage can be regarded similarly, because the success of a communicative outcome is highly context-dependent. This is completely in line with a recent statement of Janus Mortensen (2013), who writes that
we need to take the contextual factors that shape ELF encounters more seriously if we want to account for why the language use that we observe looks the way it does – and why it might look different in different ELF contexts
(Mortensen 2013: 38)

The latest contributions to ELF research allow us to focus on the specific context and situation in which English is used as a lingua franca instead of conceptualizing ELF as “predefined by a fixed system” beforehand (Park and Wee 2011: 365). In what follows, I look back at the results of my data analysis and draw attention to some influential contextual factors on the communicative outcome in the specific context of Transithuis. First, I will comment on the relationship between the participants at Transithuis. Secondly, I will argue that due to the difficult content of the conversations, giving a clear explanation is not an easy task. Finally, I will address the different levels of competence at Transithuis, in contrast with more symmetrical research settings of Anna Mauranen and Barbara Seidlhofer. I will end the chapter with a conclusive note on the recent publications mentioned above.

3.1 The complicated relationship between the participants

Firstly, the recorded data displayed a discrepancy between the participants at Transithuis, in terms of their relationship towards each other and towards the specific framework of the interaction. In extract 3, I noticed how the client and the social worker were not in agreement, even at the onset of the conversation. This, I argued, was due to their different schematic knowledge of the specific interactional framework they found themselves in (cf. Goffman’s concept of frame). As a consequence, they entered the conversation with different expectations, which caused communicative difficulties.

The particular relationship between the participants at Transithuis underlines the difference between the circumstances at Transithuis and the previously researched situations (cf. existing research on ELF in business settings or in the academic world), in which ELF is ‘underproblematised’. This relationship between the social worker and the clients at Transithuis can be characterised as unequal, and is much more complicated than for example the relationship between students or colleagues. Hülmbauer (2009) talks about the “equal NNS status” of ELF users, and contrasts this with the “asymmetrical nature” of interaction between non-native speakers and native speakers (Hülmbauer 2009: 3). Linguistically, the participants at Transithuis indeed share an “incompetence” (Kaur 2011: 113) in the language they use. Even so, that does not make them ‘equal’. What is more, from the observation that NNS-NS interaction is asymmetrical, it cannot be inferred that all NNS-NNS conversations will be symmetrical. Maria Guido’s research (2012) in immigration encounters, clearly demonstrates this. She observed
communicative difficulties that could have great implications on the immigrant’s future (Guido 2012: 228), emerging from unequal encounters between immigrants from the ‘outer circle’ (Kachru 1986), speaking endonormative variations of English and expecting to have them recognized outside their territorial milieu as a legitimate expression of their social identity [and] [...] immigration officials from [the] ‘expanding circle’ who use English with exonormative reference to Standard English norms and domain-specific registers [...]. (Guido 2012: 221)

The “unequal power distributions” (Guido 2012: 228) are even greater in Guido’s setting than in Transithuis, and they are also maintained throughout the interaction. The relationship between the participants at Transithuis, on the contrary, is less stable, because, through changes in footing (cf. Goffman), the social worker aligns with, or distance her-/himself from the client. In the data, we saw how, occasionally, the social workers engaged in very close alignment with their client to try and solve his/her problem, which is not something that the officials in Guido’s research would do. However, the degree of inequality between the participants at Transithuis cannot be disregarded. Also at Transithuis, the social worker is in a more dominant position than the client. Among other things, this is because the social worker has considerable experience with this kind of interactions, while for the client, the encounter at Transithuis could be completely new and unfamiliar. Hence, clients may not find what they expect at Transithuis, and moreover, social workers are not always able to give the client a desirable answer. As I have stressed several times, the clients who come to Transithuis often find themselves in a difficult situation which they want to change and they want to be heard. However, the principal task of the social worker is to provide him/her with administrative help or information. This discrepancy can lead to disagreement between the participants, as we saw in the analysis of the data in the previous chapter. In extract 3, there was no “negotiate[d] consensus” (Seidhlofer 2001 in Hülmbauer 2007: 11) and the participants did not “jointly [engage] in this process [of negotiating meaning]” (Hülmbauer 2007: 10). Seidhlofer (2011) concedes that in the VOICE corpus the interactions are consensus-based, but that “there are also occasions where such willingness is absent and where the use of ELF turns out to be conflictual in its consequences” (2011: 49). However, theoretically speaking, the encounters at Transithuis are service encounters, a speech even type that is represented in the VOICE corpus. Clearly, the relationship between the client and the social worker cannot be considered a stable property of the kind of interaction that takes place in Transithuis, but needs to be seen as variable and complex. Consequently, this special relationship needs to be taken into account when discussing the
language use within this framework, because it can influence the communicative outcome of the encounter directly.

### 3.2 Complex interactional content

Secondly, the source of many of the communicative difficulties observed lies in the content of the conversations at *Transithuis*, which contain very complex information that needs to be transferred. They often involve specific concepts that are not always easy to get across, let alone to be explained. Moreover, the well-being of at least one of the participants in these conversations is at stake, which makes the impact of communicative breakdown or misunderstandings much greater. In the extracts in the previous chapter, I observed more than once how difficult it was for the social worker to give a clear, simple explanation to the client. If we reconsider the example of “to do *samenwonen*” (extract 4), the social worker engaged in different accommodation strategies, such as repetition or paraphrase (see Seidlhofer 2011: 99).

Still, mutual understanding was very difficult to achieve. She displayed that she probably knew part of the ENL translation for ‘*samenlevingscontract*’ (namely ‘partnership contract’), by using the words ‘partnership’ and ‘engagement’, but what she actually meant to explain did not get across. I argued that she did not question the connotations that are attached to the different expression she used, such as ‘relationship’ and ‘partner’. Guido’s (2012, cf. supra) hypothesis about miscommunication in cross-cultural immigration encounters with ELF as the medium of communication, is applicable to this example. She observed that the speakers resort “to their own experiential schemata and native linguacultural conventions” (Guido 2012: 222).

Extract 4 shows how the participants lose track of each other during the negotiation of meaning. Much of the terminology applied at *Transithuis* is difficult to deal with, even in Dutch, but in the examples, the social workers need to find an understandable translation in English. Some clients are familiar with some of the Dutch terminology and can apply it successfully during their interview at *Transithuis*. According to Haberland (2013) this is evidence for the fact that the participants “do indeed use English as a *lingua franca* – but not only English” (2013: 196; Italics in original). In extract 6, we can see how the Dutch term *commissariaat* is understood and applied by all participants. However, we also saw in the example of ‘*samenwonen*’, that the clients do not always grasp the full meaning of the words they apply, which then gives the conversation a very complex turn.

A feature that is seen as recurrent and successful in ELF talk is “maximizing simplicity” (Mauranen 2006: 123). Seidlhofer explains this as follows:
Clarity can be enhanced by giving prominence to important elements, redundancy added or exploited, explicitness can be increased by making patterns more regular, word classes or semantic relations generally can be made more explicit.

(Seidlhofer 2011: 99)

However, ‘maximizing simplicity’ is not a feature of ELF that is applied easily in every context of use. Of course, this is not only due to the complex content of information, but also because the clients need to have a full understanding of what is told, which is an influential contextual factor that comes into play at Transithuis. This cannot be compared to for example a discussion between students at an international conference, from which Seidlhofer (2011: ix) quotes an ELF user who states that “the [most] important thing is to have a [certain] level of understanding, since we understand us who cares about the rules”. Indeed, also at Transithuis, the ENL rules will not always be the most useful to apply, but clearly, ‘a certain level of understanding’ is not always enough for the clients. Similarly, Albl-Mikasa’s data showed that ELF speaker will not always find “mutual intelligibility” (2013: 109) sufficient,

but that they will also strive to a greater and lesser degree for precision and clarity, stringency in the argumentation and rhetorical coherence, and a certain subtlety and delicacy in the nuances of their expressions.

(Albl-Mikasa 2013: 109)

In addition, I argue that this especially is the case when the specific context asks of the ELF speaker to do so. Blommaert et al. (2005: 203), accordingly state that “context [...] is not a passive ‘décor’ but an active, agentive aspect of communication”. Interaction at Transithuis, then, requires from the participants a higher level of precision and clarity than in other ELF contexts, for previously discussed reasons.

Albl-Mikasa (2013) pays attention to ELF speaker’s own judgment of their language use and remarks that the ELF users “tend to feel quite strongly about their [...] difficulties in expressing themselves at a level of precision they deem desirable” (Albl-Mikasa 2013: 107). The inability to achieve a desirable level of “express-ability” (Albl-Mikasa 2013: 108) leads to the suggestion that “[n]ot all ELF users are equally communicatively successful” (McNamara 2012, cited in Albl-Mikasa 2013: 119). This claim brings us to the next issue.

3.3 Varying levels of competence

Lastly, the diversity among the interactants at Transithuis leads to the presence of different levels of competence. This also impinged upon some of the communication in my data. Differences in proficiency have been acknowledged, but not addressed widely, by several
scholars in the field. Cogo (2010: 298) states that “ELF speakers are likely to display varying levels of competence in English, which can impinge on the outcome of the encounter”. These levels of competence have been approached and conceptualised in different ways, but mostly this has been to exemplify the difference between the concept of ‘competence’ among non-native speakers in contrast with the competence native speakers, thus focusing on the native/non-native dichotomy and not on possible differences between non-native speakers. ‘Competence’ among the ELF speakers, is for example characterised in terms of fluency (Hüttner 2009: 274). Extracts 5, 6 and 7 can be considered a failing of fluency as a “collaborative construct”, as it is perceived by Hüttner in ELF communication (2009: 282). She does not relate fluency to traditional criteria such as a higher speech rate or less hesitation markers, but she wants to conceptualise it by focusing on interactivity and remarks that fluency is constructed by all participants in a conversation (Hüttner 2009: 276). Accordingly, she notes that all parties need to “do their conversational work-load” (Hüttner 2009: 278) to ensure a smooth development of the interaction. In extract 7 the social worker tries to accommodate to her interlocutor, the Syrian man, but he does not understand her or the relevance of her questions, and he consequently turns to a third party for help to whom he can communicate in his mother language. Here, I argue that evaluation in terms of ‘proficiency’ can be invoked. It is clear that in the co-construction of meaning and, following Hüttner (2009), interactive fluency, English as a lingua franca can at times be a complicating factor. This is especially the case if the overlap of proficiency between the participants in the chosen lingua franca, is limited. In extract 7, I observed that the proficiency of one of the participants was too low for ELF communication. Michael Swan (2012) also states that “the English of some NNS is simply not very good, and can be difficult for others (NS or not) to understand” (Swan 2012: 381).

Previous research on the use of English as a lingua franca falls short in recognizing this possibility. Evaluative language about ELF communication or ELF users is considered taboo in publications on ELF talk. But, that is because a certain level of English is taken for granted in the more symmetrical research contexts analysed, and that is where research on ELF fails to encompass the totality of the use of English worldwide. For example, Mauranen (2006) explicitly states the following when talking about “investigating English as a lingua franca” (126):

all communicating parties have usually received formal instruction in English at some point. ELF is thus a ‘distant’ contact language for many speakers, that is, adopted via foreign language instruction

(Mauranen 2006: 126)
Mauranen's research is set in a very specific research context, namely the use of English as a lingua franca in academic settings. Consequently, all of the investigated interaction is among highly educated ELF speakers. Nevertheless, she represents her findings as being true for every use of English as a lingua franca and for every ELF user. This was also observed by Park and Wee (2011: 368), who noted the use of terms as “expert”, “competent” or “fluent” in publications of Jenkins and Seidlhofer, which invokes the presumption that ELF speakers are proficient users of established linguistic forms and, more remarkably, they observe that “the kind of English that the ELF project is interested in is therefore a kind of ‘educated’ English” (Park and Wee 2011: 368). Seidlhofer, in her chapter on “the dynamics of ELF usage” (2011: 94-123), indeed explicitly writes about “accomplished ELF speakers” (2011: 96).

Where Mauranen implicitly sees EFL or ESL as the common denominator from which ELF users draw their communicative competence, Seidlhofer introduces a “virtual language” as the underlying resource for ELF communication (a concept borrowed from Widdowson 1997 in Seidlhofer 2011: 110). For Seidlhofer, this is an answer to what I have called an unaddressed issue in ELF research, namely the fact that some basic level of competence is necessary before successful ELF use can take place. Although she recognises that ELF research is developing a conceptualization of ELF as fluid and hybrid, and that much depends on context, she persistently talks about a “common global resource” that is adapted by the ELF speakers (Seidlhofer 2011: 111; my emphasis). Moreover, we see how the desire to invoke the existence of some kind of ELF model from which the users draw, is still present in the work of Seidlhofer. Disregarding the fact that this 'virtual language' makes ELF research even more (unnecessarily) complex, we cannot assume that all ELF users have the same virtual construct in their minds. In Seidlhofer’s view, some of the participants in my data would be ‘unaccomplished ELF speakers’. Thus, it is clear that Seidlhofer and Mauranen take a rather one-sided view on ELF and implicitly distinguish between different ELF users, without overtly addressing this.

In the data presented in the previous chapter, however, we saw that the level of competence that is assumed in other ELF research to exist among ELF users, cannot be taken for granted in all contexts where English is used as a lingua franca. Albl-Mikasa (2013) focuses on differences between the multilingual ELF speakers as well, observing that some of them are [struggling] for self-expression [...] which [...] may foster misunderstandings when speakers do not have enough resources to monitor, re-express, explain further, or adapt and coordinate their speech, which, in the end, may affect the overall development of an interaction in ELF communication.

(Albl-Mikasa 2013: 117)
Subsequently, she wants to introduce a "developmental perspective" (Albl-Mikasa 2013: 119) on ELF, which then incorporates "the possibility of improvement or progress in the ability to manage this form of communication" (McNamara 2012, cited in Albl-Mikasa 2013: 117). Thus, by creating a "learning dimension" (Ibid.), Albl-Mikasa overtly addresses the distinction between proficient and less proficient ELF speakers, which allows us to incorporate a broader range of contexts of use in ELF research. In addition, she argues that these difficulties cannot only be addressed in relation to traditional language teaching, which is in need of adjustment (Jenkins et al. 2011: 304-307), or the imposed ideal native speaker norm (cf. section 1.2 on language ideologies), but that they can be explained in terms of "express-ability", or in other words, "the ability to express oneself" (Albl-Mikasa 2013: 108), which incorporates for example, the ability to "express complex L1 thoughts trough restricted L2 resources" (2013: 118).

Since the same level of proficiency in ELF cannot be expected among all participants at Transithuis, it is not surprising that not all findings of previous research are applicable to my data and it is in this respect that I argue that not all use of English as a lingua franca can be evaluated similarly. As some researchers have suggested (cf. reactions to ELF research discussed in chapter 1), we need to take the variable aspects of ELF into account, and this equally applies for the different contexts in which ELF is used, which is an obvious cause for variable language use. My findings thus correspond to some of the critique on early ELF research that was discussed in the first chapter, for example Firth (2009), House (2003) and Dewey (2009), who brought ELF research a 'step forward', as I called it (section 1.1.4). Mortensen (2013) continues in the same line and defines ELF as "a highly heterogeneous empirical phenomenon" (2013: 37).

3.4 A step further

Haberland (2013) equally argues for a broader view on ELF and states that "to get the bigger picture, we also have to look at the multilingual communities of practice in which English plays [a lingua franca] role" (2013: 196). Hence, we need to move away from the specific focus on English and its particular features as a lingua franca, but view the entire setting in which it is used and look at more than just linguistic features. In this respect, Susan Gal (2013) offers her point of view on the subject of ELF as a linguistic anthropologist. She writes that once we switch the focus from questions of English grammar or lexicon to the metacommunicative handling of speech events, the empirical evidence about the use of English as a lingua franca is likely to show that there are many different patterns, according to types of events, hierarchy or equality of the speakers, speakers’ experience with the event type, and a speaker’s source for knowledge of the linguistic forms recognized as English.
Moreover, Gal offers interesting insights on ELF by emphasizing the role of non-linguistic norms that are in play during social interaction. She does not see a straightforward continuum of proficiency in the English language, for example, but draws attention to the interplay between "the particular uses of speech and the local norms of interaction" (Gal 2013: 179). This can account for how participants act differently, depending on their familiarity with the particular event they are in (Ibid.).

In the analysis of the data recorded at Transithuis it became apparent how important other interactional features or norms are in discussing the language use of the client and the social worker. Extra-linguistic influential features, such as the relationship between the participants, or the need for clear and detailed information, can explain communicative choices and difficulties in the particular setting. This, of course, plays down the central role of English in the research. Park and Wee (2011: 370) state that this makes research on ELF less distinctive, "which is probably not a price that ELF proponents would be prepared to pay". However, the contributions that are published in the newly established Journal of English as a lingua franca, prove that scholars in the ELF field are becoming more tolerant towards other perspectives on the subject. Jenkins et al. (2011) and Dewey (2007; 2009), already argued for a more social perspective on language in general and ELF in particular as well. Even in 1994, Alastair Pennycook wrote a book-long discussion on The cultural politics of English as an international language, in which he argued for a "bottom-up way of understanding language" (1994: 28) and more importantly, he stated that we need

to consider language and meaning not in terms of a language system (English as an International language) and its varieties (the New Englishes) but rather in terms of the social, cultural and ideological positions in which people use language (Pennycook 1994: 31).

If we take Transithuis as a case-study of an interactional framework where English is often used as a lingua franca, we then first need to consider the social and cultural positions of the participants within this specific framework, which are not straightforward, as made clear above. Several researchers have picked this 'bottom-up' social perspective up for a different approach to ELF. Consequently, the 'recent developments' discussed in section 1.1.5 are taken even further. Janus Mortensen states that even though explicitly, the notion of ELF as "reified" (2013: 30) is denounced by for example Seidlhofer and Jenkins, this is still inferred implicitly in their research on "lexicogrammatical and pragmatic features" (2013: 35). He argues that neither the
identified lexicogrammatical features or communicative strategies (as discussed in chapter 1) are characteristic or unique to ELF interaction (Mortensen 2013: 30-35). To assert the opposite “threatens to obscure the fact that ELF is in fact an inherently complex and diverse phenomenon” (Mortensen 2013: 35). This sustains how I have tried to draw attention to the difference between ELF contexts of use, and different ELF participants within those contexts. Mortensen proposes to see ELF as “the use of English in a lingua franca scenario” (2013: 25), but acknowledges that “ELF encounters are multilingual, multicultural, and multinormative speech events that are shaped by a considerable number of contextual factors” (2013: 42). Consequently, it does not mean that because the ELF encounters happen within the same kind of language scenario, that they are inevitably similar (Mortensen 2013: 38). As is clear from this chapter, I am in complete agreement with this contribution. More importantly, Mortensen’s recent proposal is exemplary of the direction that further ELF research is taking.
This dissertation includes a lengthy discussion on the specific context of *Transithuis*, the nature of the relationship between the participants in this context, and the particular interactions that take place. Thus, I have tried to make clear that English as a lingua franca needs to be regarded in relation to the broader social framework in which it is used.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I gave an overview of ELF research and its developments over the years. We saw that the initial goal of codifying ELF was abandoned, and that the focus shifted from individual language features to the underlying processes. These processes entail raising explicitness or reducing processing effort for the interlocutor for example. However, as I pointed out, Seidlhofer (2011) still relies a lot on similar data and examples. She remains focused on linguistic peculiarities such as word innovation, etc.

The reactions to ELF research which I discussed in section 1.1.3, were insightful because they broadened the debate on ELF by questioning some of the main arguments in Jenkins and Seidlhofer’s work. At first, a lot of the reactions were put aside as misconceptions, but gradually, other perspectives on the subject were accepted. Consequently, older views on ELF were altered. ELF research was put a step forward, mainly by researchers who did not attack Jenkins and Seidlhofer, but who took their work seriously and offered constructive criticism (cf. Firth 2009, Haberland 2011, House 2003). The latest developments (section 1.1.5) prove that some of the criticism has been taken up in research on the subject. The latest contributions to research on ELF position the concept in a broader perspective. It is increasingly being accepted in its entire complexity, and researchers try less to see it as a definable entity, let alone an emerging variety (Jenkins et al 2011, Mortensen 2013). ELF is seen as characteristic of the complex globalised world, which undermines established theoretical frameworks and concepts. English as a lingua franca, in all its complexity, covers a wide range of different speakers and communicative situations.

This dissertation, which is a continuation of my bachelor paper, has taken a local welfare service as exemplary of an institutional setting in Flanders where English is used as a lingua franca between non-native speakers from a wide range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In my bachelor paper, I already distinguished between successful and less successful communicative choices of the participants at *Transithuis*. I pointed out that communicative breakdowns had more consequences in *Transithuis* than in casual situations. I concluded that other factors need to be taken into account in the discussion of ELF, and that context is the most important influential factor to consider.

In the current dissertation, I elaborated on these findings by first distinguishing between the specific research setting of *Transithuis* and academic or business contexts in which the use of
ELF is also investigated. Furthermore, I looked back at the data which I recorded for my bachelor paper. I chose to incorporate two examples that exemplified contextual factors that are worth considering. To regain familiarity with the setting, I went back to Transithuis in April 2013 and recorded three more conversations, one of which is also incorporated in this dissertation.

The data analysis showed three main contextual factors: the special relationship between the social workers and the clients, the content of the conversations, and the diversity between the participants. Because of this great diversity, my data incorporated examples of different competence levels in English, but which nevertheless were all deployed for lingua franca communication. By looking in more detail to the asymmetrical relationship between the client and the social worker, I could account for the difference in schematic knowledge. This discrepancy caused the participants to enter the conversation with different expectations or orientations towards a different conversational goal. Also the difficult content of the conversations can problematize the use of English as a lingua franca at Transithuis. The interactions contain a lot of specific words and involve the explanation of complicated administrative procedures. At times, the use of other languages (mainly Dutch) was helpful in the interactions, the refer to a specific concept. Nevertheless, as we have seen in one of the examples, the client’s full understanding of those concepts cannot be taken for granted.

The discussed contextual factors clearly all have, to a greater or lesser extent, an influence on the entire interaction and communicative outcome at Transithuis. This setting is a prime example where multicultural encounters take place and in which English is often used as a lingua franca. The communication in my data fits in the basic definitions of ELF cited in chapter 1. However, I found that English could not always be used as a reliable linguistic resource.

In chapter 3, I discussed my findings in relation to the literature on ELF. I took a critical stance towards some claims of Anna Mauaranen (2006) and Barbara Seidlhofer (2011), but aligned with several recent contributions to the field of research. The encompassing argument in these publications seems to be that ELF needs more grounding in social reality, which was already stated by Dewey (2009). This dissertation fits under this umbrella argument, by bringing a different context of ELF use to the attention. This may cause ELF researchers to meta-communicate more about their specific research settings or tell us more about their participants. In existing ELF research, this is still not mentioned explicitly enough.

Distinguishing between different settings and different ELF users would solve many misunderstandings and much confusion about the concept of ELF. In addition, incorporating a greater diversity of ELF settings will take research further away from an abstraction of ELF, which is devoid from social reality. Less generalization and more diversification will create a socially embedded approach to ELF and will make ELF research truly sociolinguistic.
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