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Communication courtesy or condescension? Linguistic accommodation of native to non-native speakers of English

Komunikacijska pristojnost ili pokroviteljski stav? Jezična akomodacija izvornih govornika engleskoga jezika u komunikaciji s neizvornim govornicima

Abstract: This paper draws on the perception of English as a lingua franca (ELF) as an activity, rather than a variety, whereby speakers of different lingua-cultural backgrounds respond to the needs of the immediate communicative environment. Such dynamic and context-related nature of ELF involves collaboration and accommodative behaviour of all interlocutors. As the main focus of research on ELF has been interaction predominantly among non-native speakers of English, the present study investigates how native English speakers behave in ELF interaction, that is, whether/how they accommodate their English and what their stance is towards linguistic accommodation. Responses were collected by means of an online questionnaire, yielding 377 respondents in total, who report making adjustments when communicating with non-native speakers, most frequently by enunciating clearly, using fewer idioms and speaking more slowly. The main reasons native speakers give for adjusting their language are promoting mutual intelligibility, showing courtesy and helping the interlocutor hone their English language skills. A fifth of the respondents, however, worry that accommodation might prevent the improvement of non-native speakers' English proficiency, be perceived as being patronising, and reduce the quality of conversation.

Keywords: ELF, native English speakers, non-native English speakers, linguistic accommodation, language attitudes

Sažetak: Engleski kao *lingua franca* (ELF) u ovome se radu promatra kao aktivnost, a ne varijetet. Tom aktivnošću govornici različitoga jezično-kulturnog

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predznaka odgovaraju na potrebe neposrednoga komunikacijskog okruženja. Tako dinamična i kontekstualno uvjetovana priroda ELF-a podrazumijeva suradnju i prilagodbu svih sugovornika. Budući da su dosadašnja istraživanja sporazumijevanja na ELF-u prvenstveno bila usmjerena na interakciju između neizvornih govornika engleskoga jezika, ovom se studijom ispituje kako se izvorni govornici ponašaju u razgovoru na ELF-u – akomodiraju li se pritom jezično i kako to čine – te kakav je njihov stav prema jezičnoj akomodaciji. Metodom mrežnoga upitnika prikupljeni su podaci od ukupno 377 ispitanika, a njihova je analiza pokazala da su izvorni govornici skloni jezičnoj akomodaciji u razgovoru s neizvornicima, najčešće razgovijetnim izgovorom, rjeđom uporabom idioma i sporijim govorom. Glavni su razlozi prilagodbe želja za osiguravanjem međusobnoga razumijevanja, pristojno ponašanje i pomoć sugovorniku da unaprijedi svoje engleske jezične vještine. Petina se ispitanika međutim pita priječi li akomodacija razvoj engleskih jezičnih kompetencija kod sugovornika, stavlja li ona sugovornika u podređen položaj i umanjuje li kvalitetu razgovora.

Ključne riječi: ELF, izvorni govornici engleskoga jezika, neizvorni govornici engleskoga jezika, jezična akomodacija, jezični stavovi

1 Introduction

English achieving global status (Crystal 2003), its nativisation or indigenisation in different parts of the world (Kachru 1986), the spread of English as a lingua franca (ELF) and its study (Jenkins 2000; Seidlhofer 2001a, 2011) have challenged the centrality of the native speaker (NS). In other words, the importance of near-nativeness has been to an extent demoted, and non-native speakers (NNSs) also lay claim to ownership of English (cf. Haberland 2011; Widdowson 1994). As ELF, a means of communication for speakers of different mother tongues, involves an "exceptional linguistic and cultural heterogeneity" (Dewey 2014: 14), it does not generally conform to the norms defined in reference to NS standards and accuracy (cf. Ehrenreich 2009; Firth 1996; Seidlhofer 2004). It has often been stated that ELF "will increasingly derive its norms of correctness and appropriacy from its own usage rather than that of the UK or the US" (Seidlhofer 2001b: 15), and thus "may be quite radically different from that which characterizes the linguistic behaviour of ENL [English as a native language] speaker" (Seidlhofer 2009a: 202). ELF has been depicted as English that "exists in its own right and which is being described in its own terms rather than by comparison with ENL" (Jenkins 2007: 2).

This paper primarily focuses on the dynamic and fluid character of ELF communication. ELF is perceived as an activity in which people of different "lingua-cultural backgrounds negotiate and accommodate their English *in situ*" (Jenkins 2012: 490). In other words, ELF use is highly variable, flexible and unpredictable as it meets the needs of the immediate communicative environment (cf. Dewey 2014; Mauranen 2006). Hülmbauer (2009: 324) argues that every lingua franca interaction is determined by "the situationality factor", implying that ELF is not characterised by a stable set of features, but changes according to the setting. Similarly, Park and Wee describe ELF as an activity type, rather than a variety, which is in line with language being interpreted "not as a fixed structural system with static rules but as an emergent product of speakers' practices" (Park and Wee 2011: 361), or, as Canagarajah puts it, as "constantly brought into being in each context of communication" (Canagarajah 2007: 926). In addition to relying on the existing ENL verbal repertoire, ELF speakers create new pseudo-English expressions according to the "open-choice principle" (Seidlhofer 2009a: 203).

As it might be assumed that such dynamic and context-specific ELF interaction is prone to misunderstanding (cf. Mauranen 2006), it should involve high levels of linguistic accommodation, that is, cooperation on the part of all the interlocutors, coming from different lingua-cultural milieus and having different levels of English language competence, with the aim of arriving at mutual understanding and establishing effective communication.

The main focus of research on ELF has been NNS–NNS interaction, but there is also a need to understand NS–NNS communication in ELF more thoroughly. Specifically, it is necessary to see whether NSs feel that they share responsibility for the success of such communication as well as for its breakdown, and how they behave in communication with their non-native interlocutors, that is, whether and how they accommodate their language and what their attitudes are towards linguistic accommodation. While NNSs of English may miscommunicate due to their L1 interferences and insufficient level of English proficiency, NSs of English may cause miscommunication when using idioms, localisms and contractions, as well as other features that may not be comprehensible in ELF interaction (cf. Haberland 2011; Seidlhofer 2001a, 2009a).

2 Linguistic accommodation

Early sociolinguistic research on linguistic accommodation, in terms of style-shifting, was conducted by Labov (1966) and followed by studies in social

psychology from which speech accommodation theory and, later, communication accommodation theory developed (e.g. Coupland et al. 1988; Giles and Coupland 1991). Broadly speaking, accommodation theory, in terms of convergence towards one's interlocutor, as opposed to divergence from them, suggests adjusting one's language in response to the interlocutor with the aim of promoting mutual intelligibility and eliciting positive feedback rather than sticking to language use that the interlocutor might find unintelligible or hard to digest. Accommodative behaviour comprises lexical (cf. Garrod and Doherty 1994), structural (cf. Pickering and Ferreira 2008) and phonetic (cf. Babel 2012) convergence. Specifically, it comprises different strategies used "to modify the complexity of speech (for example, by decreasing diversity of vocabulary, or simplifying syntax), increase clarity (by changing pitch, loudness, tempo by repetition, clarification checks, explicit boundarying devices and so on)" (Giles and Coupland 1991: 88) and can vary from few adjustments to an almost exact reflection of the interlocutor's language (Coupland et al. 1988), involving even the use of ungrammatical forms (Ferguson 1975).

Mutual intelligibility, which is "the focus of the ELF orientation" (Sifakis 2014: 131), hinges on accommodative behaviour and is accomplished via a number of accommodation and negotiation strategies, such as understanding checks, restatements, confirmation checks and repetition (cf. Cogo and Dewey 2006, 2012; Kaur 2012). In other words, seeing ELF as a product emerging within particular instances of interaction relies on the linguistic adjustment of the interlocutors, whereby they try to prevent potential misunderstanding or communication breakdown, rather than on "correctness" according to the NS model (Cogo 2016). Although certain factors, such as lack of knowledge of the world, inadequate linguistic resources/skills, lack of perception of the nature of conversation and the interlocutors' uncooperativeness, can cause miscommunication in intercultural interaction (cf. House 1999; Kaur 2011b), research on ELF reveals that misunderstanding is rare (cf. Cogo 2016; Kaur 2012; Meierkord 2000) due to the interlocutors' "ability to master smooth continuity in ongoing talk" (House 2013: 65) and their considerable effort devoted to forestalling miscommunication (Mauranen 2006). In other words, interlocutors negotiate the extent of convergence towards each other with the aim of "maintaining the interactional flow, resolving differences, attaining communicative efficiency, seeking approval, reaching agreements [...] building solidarity" (Zhu 2015: 84). Besides, miscommunication is "an inherent part of – any kind of – communication" (Pitzl 2015: 120), including that among NSs of a language, and should not be primarily associated with interculturality and inadequate proficiency. Importance thus should be placed on the ways of negotiating, managing or

preventing miscommunication, that is, on joint creation of understanding (cf. Cogo and Pitzl 2016; Pitzl 2015).

Involvement in ELF communication by its very nature implies collaboration, where those engaged modify and adapt their English in order to appear "sensitive to the speech of their interlocutors" (Dewey 2014: 16) and ultimately to express the intended meaning and make it interpretable for the listener. Worgan and Moore (2011: 1111) depict conversation as "a shared set of interaction affordances" manipulated and negotiated by each participant striving to reach the wanted outcome. Potential miscommunication, as already stated, should not be associated with NNSs by default (Rajadurai 2007; Sweeney and Zhu 2010), and speakers of "the 'mainstream' language must share communicative responsibility" (Kubota 2001: 47). Abiding by NS norms does not necessarily mean successful interaction here, while deviating from them can be effective as well as creative (Cogo 2009, 2012a; Hülmbauer 2009). ELF speakers evolve their own communicative strategies, styles and means, and modify linguistic resources to be responsive to the immediate communicative surrounding and their own needs (cf. House 2013; Kaur 2012).

Intercultural accommodation is intertwined with ELF communication. Participants inevitably bring their culturally based perceptions and values in ELF interaction, which then require adaptive accommodation so as to negotiate cultural differences, thereby also developing an awareness of other cultures (cf. Cogo 2016; Holland and Gentry 1999; Zhu 2015). Culture in intercultural communication, as Baker describes, is an emergent, fluid and negotiated resource "which moves between and across local, national, and global contexts" (Baker 2012: 64). In addition to managing cultural differences, negotiation and taking advantage of linguistic diversity are also important aspects of accommodation (cf. Sachdev et al. 2013; Seidlhofer 2009b; Stell and Dragojevic 2016). To enhance communication efficiency and potential, the speaker, both native and non-native, includes multilingual resources that are part of their own multilingual verbal repertoire and which they know are part of the listener's repertoire (cf. Cogo 2016; Platt 1977; Seidlhofer 2009b). ELF is a "multilingual practice" (Jenkins 2015: 63), and occasional switching to the interlocutor's L1 or any other language that the interlocutors share, or modifying English to resemble structures in these languages, presents an important pragmatic strategy, whereby both conversation flow and rapport are maintained.

Research on linguistic accommodation shows that NSs adjust their language in conversation with NNSs (more often than in communication with native ones), in terms of a slower speech rate, redundancy, reduced syntactic complexity, checking the interlocutor's understanding, clearly articulated pronunciation,

fewer contractions, high-frequency vocabulary, fewer pronouns (cf. Ferguson 1975; Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991) and fewer idiomatic expressions (cf. Bortfeld and Brennan 1997; Seidlhofer 2009a). This inclination towards linguistic adjustment mirrors NSs' desire for communication efficiency and for acknowledging NNSs' language efforts (cf. Clyne 1981).

Some authors, however, suggest that NSs still lack flexibility in their use of the language (cf. Jenkins 2012; Sweeney and Zhu 2010), for example, in terms of the speed of speech and use of idioms (Cogo 2016), which often makes them less comprehensible than competent speakers of English as a foreign language. Hence, they propose what NSs should do to make it easier for their non-native interlocutors and help them feel comfortable and confident in communication with NSs. Jenkins notes that "the starting point for native English speakers is less onerous", still, it is "an additional language for them too" (Jenkins 2011), and they should act accordingly. For example, Jenkins et al. (2001) hold that NSs will have to acquire the ELF core features productively and the non-core L2 regional features receptively, and develop certain adjustment skills to accommodate their language spontaneously in interaction with NNSs. Linguistic accommodation is both productive and receptive, meaning that NSs need not only to be able to accommodate their language in order to be intelligible but also to develop tolerance of and certain familiarity with the language spoken by their non-native interlocutors (Rogerson-Revell 2010). Strategic competences involve being sensitive to breakdowns in communication and familiar with the ways of avoiding or overcoming them, as well as "attuning to [the interlocutor's] turn-taking and other behaviours" (Murray 2012: 322). Subtirelu and Lindemann (2014) list three approaches that could help NSs effectively participate in ELF communication and benefit English L2 speakers: (i) improving attitudes of L1 speakers towards L2 users of English, as negative attitudes adversely affect their ability to understand their non-native interlocutors and adequately employ particular communicative strategies; (ii) increasing their familiarity with and comprehension of foreign accents; and (iii) training in skills for ELF interaction, based on examples of best practice (cf. Rogerson-Revell 2010).

3 The study

The present study seeks to explore which implications the spread of English as a global language has for NSs and their linguistic behaviour. Specifically, it enquires into how they integrate into the world where their native language is being

modified by a large number of speakers coming from a large number of lingua-cultural milieus, that is, whether/how they adapt their language when necessary to foster mutual intelligibility and the spontaneous flow of conversation.

The primary aim is to investigate whether and to what extent NSs employ linguistic accommodation in interaction with NNSs, what forms this accommodation takes and what it is motivated by. The NSs' awareness of and inclination towards linguistic accommodation are also examined, as are their attitudes towards the idea of their acquiring some (additional) competences in order to adjust their English more successfully in communication with NNSs. Finally, NSs' perception of ELF is looked at.

3.1 Research method

The participants' responses were collected by means of an online questionnaire. The link to the questionnaire was distributed via e-mail, Facebook account and LinguistList, with the original recipients being exhorted to share the link with other NSs of English.

The questionnaire comprised 17 questions, including probing sub-questions, grouped in four parts. Part I, comprising seven questions, elicited the respondents' background information, including gender, age, level of education, the varieties of English that they were NSs of, regional varieties of English that they spoke and languages other than English that they spoke. The questions on whether the participants speak any regional varieties of English or any languages other than English were included in the questionnaire in order to see whether they practiced some forms of linguistic accommodation, other than style- or register-guided. In Part II, consisting of five questions, two Likert-type questions complemented by an "Other" textbox investigated: (i) whether and to what extent the respondents adjusted their English when communicating with NNSs and which accommodative strategies they used, and (ii) how they decided whether to adjust their English. Two open-ended questions asked the respondents why they accommodated or did not accommodate the language, and a yes/no question, which required additional explanation, explored whether the respondents had doubts about their decision to adjust their English. In question 8, which enquired into whether and to what extent the respondents adjusted their English in any of the ways provided, care was taken to describe these ways in such a manner as to guarantee that they would be clear to respondents of various educational levels and levels of familiarity with basic linguistic terms; that is, it was explained that "using fewer idioms" meant using constructions such as *he died* instead of *he kicked*

the bucket and that "using fewer assimilations in connected speech" meant, for example, using *ten men* instead of *tem men*. Several respondents pointed out in their comments that the decision to employ or not to employ a particular accommodation strategy, or any accommodation strategy at all, as well as the decision to what extent to use it would for many depend upon their perception of the NNS's English proficiency and/or level of education, and this was something specifically asked about in question 9. In Part III, comprising two questions, the question enquiring into whether the participants thought that they should acquire some (additional) skills necessary for successful adjustment to NNSs could be answered by selecting "yes", "no" or "not sure". Via an open-ended question, the respondents were asked to describe these skills and how they could be acquired. Part IV, consisting of a multiple-choice question complemented by an "Other" textbox, a yes/no question and a yes/no question which required additional explanation, investigated what the participants understood ELF to mean, whether they saw it as a separate variety of English in its own right and whether they thought that even NSs would have to learn this variety, respectively. Finally, the respondents were encouraged to offer any additional comments.

3.2 Participants

The sample comprised 377 NSs of English. Female respondents comprised 62.77% of the total, male ones 36.17%, whereas 1.06% preferred not to say. As for age distribution, 2.93% of the respondents were in the 16–20 age group, 11.7% were 21–25, 13.3% were 26–30, 29.52% were 31–40, 18.88% were 41–50, 14.36% were 51–60 and 9.31% were 61 years old or above. The highest level of education completed was primary/elementary school for 0.53% of the respondents, secondary/high school for 8.51%, university/college for 29.52% and a postgraduate degree for 61.44% of the respondents. Of all those with degrees, 47.34% have a degree in language sciences (defined in the relevant question as including linguistics, modern or classical languages and similar programmes). The disproportionate share of postgraduate-degree holders as well as the percentage of linguists among them are both attributable to the way in which the link was distributed: via e-mail and Facebook, where a large proportion of the contacts have attained postgraduate degrees (in language sciences), and the fact that the survey link was posted on LinguistList also accounts for the number of linguists in the survey.

The majority of the respondents (61.97%) declared themselves to be NSs of American English, 33.24% are NSs of British English, while 6.65% are NSs

of other varieties: Canadian, Australian and Irish English. A majority (72.07%) claimed that they did not speak a regional dialect of English, whereas 27.93% claimed that they did. The percentage of the respondents claiming to speak at least one language other than English was 79.26%. The different languages listed totalled 77, and the average number of languages declared by the respondents was two. The most frequently listed languages were, in order of frequency: French (declared by 51.68% of the respondents), Spanish (44.3%), German (32.55%), Italian (16.11%) and Russian (9.4%). These data could be attributed to the educational background of the respondents, their multicultural ethnic background and/or their international outlook.

4 NSs and ELF communication

The first part of this section reports on the accommodative tools used by NSs, as well as reasons for their employment. The second part looks at (additional) skills, knowledge and traits perceived desirable for successful linguistic accommodation. The concerns raised around accommodative behaviour are described in the third part. The last part presents the participants' stance towards ELF.

4.1 How and why NSs accommodate their English in ELF communication

The respondents, 85.41% of whom reported ever adjusting their English, were asked whether they accommodated the language in communication with NNSs in any of the ways listed in the question, and to rate their adjusting on a scale where 1 was "not at all" and 5 was "to a very large extent" (the option "I don't know" was also offered). The average rates for each of the accommodation strategies, mostly adopted from the relevant literature on ELF communication and from personal communication with NSs, are as follows:
– enunciating clearly (rated at 3.71);
– using fewer idioms (3.63);
– using fewer colloquial words or phrases (3.49);
– speaking more slowly than usual (3.49);
– simplifying sentence construction (3.36);

– using fewer regional words or phrases (3.29);
– using more high-frequency words (3.22);
– using fewer contractions (2.8);
– using fewer elisions in connected speech (2.79);
– using fewer assimilations in connected speech (2.77);
– using more questions (2.48);
– using grammatical features that would be considered incorrect in the standard variety of English that you speak (2.04);
– using words or expressions with a meaning that would be considered incorrect in the standard variety of English that you speak (1.91);
– using pronunciation features that would be considered incorrect in the standard variety of English that you speak (1.9);
– speaking more loudly than usual (1.89);
– using fewer pronouns (1.78).

The "I don't know" option was most frequently chosen for the following strategies: "using fewer assimilations in connected speech" (21.05%), "using more high-frequency words" (16.67%), "using more questions" (11.99%) and "using fewer elisions in connected speech" (10.23%).

In addition, the respondents could specify accommodation strategies other than the ones provided. These include: avoiding irony, sarcasm and humour that might be culture-specific; avoiding slang, words and phrases that might be incomprehensible to NNSs, as well as compound words; explaining the meaning of a word or phrase used, offering synonyms for expressions used, pairing an idiom with a literal translation of its meaning and rephrasing; repeating information; using present tense verbs and reducing the number of phrasal verbs; enhancing intonation patterns, adjusting prosody for emphasis, maintaining word boundaries more clearly and pausing more after more complex or less common words; using gestures, exaggerated facial expressions and body language, and avoiding gestures that have a different meaning in the interlocutor's culture.

> I lengthen between-thought pauses, repeat and offer synonyms for expressions I have used, and make my "highs" higher and my "lows" lower regarding stress and intonation. I only use simple sentence structure [...] and do a lot of negotiation of meaning. (177)

> Gestures that do not have the same meaning in the listener's culture (e.g. touching forefinger to thumb meaning A-OK or 'just right' in English but 'zero' in Hebrew) should be avoided. (350)

> It is as though speaking to a non-native English speaker turns me into a non-native speaker. (300)

Some respondents use knowledge of their interlocutor's native language as one of their accommodation strategies. They also report using Latin-derived words if the NNS is a NS of a Romance language. Several respondents say that they switch from American into British English and vice versa in order to accommodate to NNSs.

> I sometimes will use incorrect or awkward English that mirrors the construction in Ukrainian or Russian. (12)

> I make some adjustments in pronunciation and intonation specific to their L1. (155)

> I sometimes use words/phrases of the native language of the listener. (222)

> When I lived in Germany I would sometimes use British English vocabulary, since that's what most people there are more familiar with. (88)

For the purposes of helping their interlocutors improve their English, most respondents adjust their language in terms of slowing down and speaking distinctly. Conversely, a few report using "standardised", "proper" or "complex" language with the same aim.

> It is critical that a person be able to discern the components of speech in order to be able to recombine them into their own unique utterances. So, it is actually necessary to speak slowly and distinctly for a certain learning to occur. (33)

> I adjust TOWARD using more complex, low frequency and standard language to help learners expand their vocabulary and improve their English. (20)

> Using proper sentence structure – to avoid embarrassment for the listener in later conversations with others. (80)

Those respondents who reported accommodating their English were asked how they decided whether to do it. On a scale ranging from 1 ("it doesn't apply to me at all") to 5 ("it applies to me completely"), the respondents were asked to rate the following options: "I assess the other person's level of English proficiency" (rated at an average of 4.22), "I do it automatically as soon as I know that the other person is not a native speaker" (2.53) and "I assess the other person's level of education" (2.22).

The respondents were also asked to provide at least three reasons for adjusting their English. Their responses are: to facilitate understanding, that is, prevent or fix misunderstanding and make sure that the meaning has been conveyed as clearly as possible; to aid the conversation progress and accomplish conversational goals; to reduce conflict and cause less frustration, that is, create a pleasant experience and develop trust; to establish a positive view of NSs and avoid sounding uneducated or rude; to make it possible for NNSs to pick up on

certain words; and to behave in line with what is normative and expected. Here is a selection of the respondents' answers:

> To improve the chances of successfully imparting the core message, to reduce the risk of inadvertently causing offence, to ensure a more efficient use of time. (13)

> If the person looks confused or does not react in the way expected, if they do not respond to a question or respond inappropriately, and if they mask their lack of understanding but disengage from the conversation. (130)

> It's good manners and benefits the relationship. (65)

> To avoid making differences between my English and other people's English obvious. (100)

The following quotes indicate that non-native interlocutors' feelings and needs are considered and that care is taken that they are included in and welcome to the conversation, particularly as many respondents imagine themselves in the shoes of the NNS. Also, NNSs' efforts to learn and use English are appreciated.

> My deepest intention is that people to whom I speak feel involved in the conversation. I have noticed the frustration on the faces of non-English speakers when I speak to them in a conversational manner such as I would use with another English speaker. (17)

> To avoid embarrassing the non-English speaker, that is, making them request re-wording or repetition. (177)

> I appreciate speakers of other languages adjusting their speech when they speak to me in a target foreign language, and making it easier for me to understand what they are saying. (322)

> Adjusting my English is a small compromise to their adoption of the language. (66)

Linguistic accommodation is also seen as part of rational communicative behaviour, which happens in all communication, including that with other NSs.

> I also adjust the way I speak with native English speakers of different dialects, social classes, levels of education etc. – it's not a native/non-native division, but rather an intuition to achieve appropriate communication. (301)

> Communication is a necessary part of life, and if an individual refuses to adjust their language to a situation then they are not actively trying to communicate. (270)

For some, accommodation is interlocutor- and context-dependent. There are particular contexts in which linguistic accommodation seems to be particularly desirable, such as business communication, where it is essential to provide comprehensible input, resulting in a successful transaction or a job done, and teaching situations, where it is crucial that knowledge of the material be imparted. Also, some are more inclined to accommodate their language with

people whose first language is not English when in non-English-speaking countries than in their own English native context.

> I modify my speech more for engineers, physicists and business people than I do for linguists and ESL teachers. (155)

> When you're at work, the stakes are high and mutual understanding is a must. (90)

> I do recognise that particularly in business environments there is an agenda to be met and points to be agreed, so if there is someone who is struggling to understand, I will moderate my vocabulary, pacing and intonation in the interests of getting the message across. (145)

Finally, not all accommodation strategies are deemed equally appropriate, applicable and useful.

> Some adjustments are helpful and relatively harmless – speaking more slowly and more clearly, for example. But some I think might do more harm than good: avoiding certain words or constructions may make it easier to communicate immediately, but even if your listener really wouldn't understand, it might be something they want to learn. And using ungrammatical features provides incorrectly positive feedback that might get in the way of acquiring real proficiency. (15)

> I don't think there's anything wrong in those situations with slowing down speech or using less difficult constructions/lexical items. What I would question would be using Ukrainian/Russian-influenced English, for example "he came to me this weekend" and not "he visited me this weekend/he came over to my place this weekend". (215)

4.2 (Additional) skills, knowledge and traits perceived necessary for an effective language adjustment

In terms of the acquisition of some (additional) skills necessary for successful adjustment to NNSs, 37.93% of the respondents would like to acquire some (additional) competences, 35.74% do not find it necessary, while 26.33% are not sure. Some of the skills/traits provided and described by the respondents are intercultural communication skills, listening skills, awareness, patience, tolerance and respect. In other words, the respondents hold that NSs should be (more) aware and tolerant of NNSs' mother tongue interferences, false friends, pseudo-Anglicisms and the fact that meaning can change in the process of linguistic borrowing. They also believe that NSs should be (more) sensitive and responsive to the needs of their non-native interlocutors and acquainted with the problems NNSs face when learning English. Finally, according to the respondents, NSs should have a better understanding of English grammar rules so they can adapt them, and have at least basic grounding in teaching English to speakers of other languages, second language acquisition, cultural studies and

related fields. In the respondents' opinion, these skills/knowledge could be acquired by practice, that is, through conversation with NNSs, hearing and reading about NNSs' experiences, familiarising with other cultures, travelling in order to gain some experience of being a NNS, learning other languages and other Englishes, having differences between languages pointed out during formal foreign language education and being trained in recognising different proficiency levels. Also, in order to get hints on specific accommodation strategies, the respondents believe that they should attend (web-based) seminars, participate in workshops, watch online video clips on the topic and take language courses. Several respondents shared their experience of the relevant education.

> I'd like to know more about the ways to "internationalise" one's English, such as which words are most frequent, which grammatical features tend to be difficult for non-native speakers to grasp, and what types of expressions I should avoid. (47)

> I've lived in China for 10 years, and I'm quite practiced. (314)

> As an ESL instructor with an MSc in Education degree specialising in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, I think my skill level is sufficient at this point. (13)

> We had a primer on Indian Standard English prior to sub-contracting with a firm in India. (122)

4.3 Concerns related to linguistic accommodation

One fifth of the respondents doubt the appropriateness of adjusting English in communication with NNSs, 3.85% of whom do adjust (but think that they should not). They advance several reasons for this. Firstly, the respondents are worried about appearing offensive or being condescending if they adjust their language. By accommodating, they fear that they might patronise their interlocutors and underestimate their linguistic abilities. A respondent says that they would not want to be perceived as "talking down to a strong-proficiency non-native speaker" (22). Also, these respondents themselves would not want to be treated differently when in the position of a NNS and find it "annoying when people dumb down their speech" for them (56). Secondly, some respondents do not want "to undercut the quality of the discussion" (44) as they think that the use of accommodation strategies might lead to an unnatural and low-quality interaction for all interlocutors. Thirdly, they feel that making adjustments might be a hindrance to NNSs' efforts to improve their English skills or to test their mastery of English. These respondents "try to avoid simplifying [their] English too much when

communicating with non-native speakers because a more natural approach to speaking English ultimately provides a richer communication experience and an opportunity to learn more" (99). Fourthly, they find it impossible to accommodate to innumerable English varieties because "features of English as spoken in South Asia or Japan might not apply in other countries where English is widely used as a lingua franca" (325). Fifthly, some respondents feel that there is no need for accommodation in their language as their English is clear and understandable enough anyway. They "ALWAYS enunciate quite clearly and speak rather posh RP with no local or regional features" (23), and "assimilations and elisions do not feature in [their] speech" (38). Finally, some underscore that degrading language means denying nationality or, in a respondent's words, "if one degrades their English, one isn't English" (75).

4.4 Looking at ELF through NSs' lenses

At the end of the survey, the respondents were asked what they understood ELF to mean. Some of the offered responses are:

> A standard variety which permits certain non-standard use which may resemble the L1. It also favours the simplification of standard English in terms of the use of perfect tenses, phrasal verbs and idioms. (23)

> A variety of English that operates primarily with high-frequency and non-regional/idiomatic/colloquial usage. (194)

> I think that is an ever-changing/evolving variety that emerges (is made and learned simultaneously) as speakers (both native and non-native) communicate with one another. (247)

> A Chinese woman is the manager of a unit. She points to a drop-down list-box selection field on the computer screen and says: "I click! Why he not open?" And the listener responded: "I don't think he is enabled". And forevermore after that, all GUI-objects were spoken of as if they were gender-male (wilful/animated) things. (356)

ELF is also perceived as a dialect of English, a pidgin English and a sub-set of the native language. Some respondents use expressions such as "flawed", "inaccurate" and "broken" to describe it. The largest number of the respondents (42.59%) do not see ELF as a separate variety of English in its own right. Of those who do (29.94%), 28.26% think that even NSs should learn this variety. The general feeling, however, seems to be against learning in the conventional sense (apart from an occasional expression, idiom, nuance of meaning or regionalism, e.g. *Where do you stay in?*, 'Where do you live?', in South African English or *updation*, 'updating', in Indian English). Rather, the

respondents mention "becoming aware of the variations brought into the language", "becoming more tolerant and willing to accommodate" and "adapting while communicating".

> It's not clear what we would be learning, precisely. I imagine these features emerge from adapting formally taught languages rather than constituting a fixed set of rules that can be taught or learned. (86)

> Holistic, natural learning yes, formal classes no. (122)

> There may be quirks that people might need to adjust to, but any dedicated learning is probably unnecessary. (167)

> Not learning, just simplifying forms and expressions. (243)

5 Discussion

The findings of this study show that the majority of the respondents report some sort of linguistic adjustment, primarily guided by their interlocutor's level of English language proficiency. Bearing in mind that all the participants in communication share equal responsibility for its success (cf. Canagarajah 2007; Kubota 2001; Lippi-Green 1997), they tailor their language to the perceived needs of their non-native interlocutors and consider this to be the right thing to do and an important aspect of their communicative competence. The respondents believe that without accommodation their interlocutors would feel as if they were being corrected or given a language lesson. The most frequently employed techniques are enunciating clearly, using fewer idioms and colloquial words, speaking more slowly and simplifying sentence construction, that is, employing a "careful speech style" (Rogerson-Revell 2010: 446). The respondents also mention utilising knowledge of the interlocutor's first language as a means of convergence, and report negotiating or approximating what they perceive to be the features of another language. For example, they make use of words and phrases from their interlocutor's L1 or reshape some English expressions so that they reflect constructions from the interlocutor's first language. They also use Latin-derived words if their interlocutor is a NS of a Romance language. The majority of the respondents see accommodation as socially desirable and rational communicative behaviour, where "non-English speakers are just part of the continuum" (200). A minority see linguistic adjustment to be context- and interlocutor-dependent. One of the situations where accommodative behaviour is regarded as particularly important is business ELF communication because paraphrasing, asking for clarification, checking

for understanding, signalling (non)understanding and drawing on multilingual resources are considered vital for successful business interaction and, ultimately, getting the job done (cf. Cogo 2012a, 2016; Kankaanranta et al. 2015; Pitzl 2010; Rogerson-Revell 2010). Also, some NSs are more inclined to accommodate their language with NNSs in non-English-speaking countries than in English-speaking countries. This point, however, was not explicitly investigated, but emerged as a relevant theme from the data. Given its importance for understanding NSs' decision or perceived need to accommodate their language in communication with NNSs and their inclination to help their non-native interlocutors improve their English, this topic requires further research.

Before moving on with the discussion, it should be noted that although some of the accommodation strategies present ELF as a simplified medium of communication, neglecting to an extent the richness, creativity and variability of conversation in ELF, research shows that ELF is also a complex, multilingual and intercultural phenomenon, where innovative expressions are created (albeit not matching those used by NSs), multilingual resources are used both by native and non-native interlocutors, and English is adapted and blended creatively (cf. Cogo 2009, 2012b; Hülmbauer 2009; Jenkins 2015; Seidlhofer 2009a). The notion of lingua franca has altered, as Li Wei reports, to represent "a fluid and dynamic form of linguistic creativity whose meaning is negotiated in real-life social interaction" (Li Wei 2016: 2). Also, although the respondents were asked whether they saw ELF as a separate variety of English in its own right, this does not imply presenting ELF as a variety in terms of a stable and fixed "type of language spoken by a precise speech community" (Cogo 2012b: 98). ELF is a product of practice and is co-constructed by its users in a particular communicative encounter through negotiation, accommodation and the use of multilingual resources. Similarly, the respondents do not seem to perceive ELF as "a stable system that exists outside of language use" (Cogo 2012a: 290), as in their responses/ comments ELF is predominantly seen through a prism of flux, variability and ad hoc-ness, where accommodation and co-construction play a pivotal role (cf. Cogo 2012b; Jenkins 2015; Seidlhofer 2009b). It is interesting to see how some respondents incorporate "English as a variety" and its "fluid", "emergent" and "ever-changing" nature within the same comment, which also suggests that they do not associate variety with anything prespecified and stable.

The main reasons why the respondents adjust their language are to facilitate interaction, ensure message transmission and help communication progress. Closely follows communication courtesy and a feeling that NNSs' efforts to

learn and use English should be accorded respect, which involves making some concessions. The third motive is to avoid conflict and create a cosy atmosphere by making non-native interlocutors feel welcome and encouraged to take an equal share in communication. Linguistic accommodation thus is not only seen as an inherent part of everyday communication employed to aid conversation efficiency but also as an example of good communication practice which leads to the establishment of relaxed discourse. In addition, such behaviour is reported to help NSs feel confident that they have been understood and seen as friendly. Although some respondents hold that by accommodating, NSs make it easier for their non-native addressees and invest more effort themselves, the majority hold that accommodation saves NSs' time and energy as pre-empting strategies exempt them from later repeating, rephrasing and providing additional explanation. Also, the respondents point out that it is easier for NSs to adjust than "to enforce the non-native to work harder at understanding"; that is, "it is the role of the native English speaker, who is a lot more comfortable in the language, to adapt their grammar and vocabulary to make themselves understood" (294). Finally, NSs do it for pedagogical purposes, that is, to help non-native interlocutors hone their English language skills. They believe that in communication with NNSs, the NS is a role model, not only in terms of being equipped with language proficiency but also in terms of being sensitive to and appreciative of their learners' language skills, needs and possibilities. In their opinion, a person striving to teach their native language to NNSs needs to adapt it to a certain degree in order to bring it closer to learners and enhance their motivation.

Our findings confirm that linguistic accommodation most frequently assumes a shape of phonetic convergence (cf. Babel 2012). The respondents regard clear enunciation as the most important accommodation strategy, probably because pronunciation is an area with the largest "potential for unintelligibility and miscommunication" (Matsumoto 2011: 98; cf. Thomason 2001). However, they rarely opt for "incorrect" pronunciation patterns that can result from mimicking pronunciation and intonation specific to their interlocutor's English accent; rather, they tend to articulate clearly, avoid elisions and assimilations, and slower their speech rate. Similarly, in terms of grammatical adjustment, the respondents simplify structures, but rarely resort to grammar-related features that do not comply with NS norms, as they do not see it to be essential for getting the message across and establishing effective and pleasant conversation. In other words, they do not think that conformity with NS morphosyntactic norms necessarily ensures mutual intelligibility, but also do not hold that it impedes mutual understanding or makes it harder for the non-native interlocutor. This is in line with the results of Meierkord's study (Meierkord 2004), which

show that 88% of all ELF conversation conforms to the grammatical rules of English L1 varieties.

In terms of the acquisition of (additional) skills necessary for an efficient participation in ELF communication, the respondents underscore the importance of developing listening skills, raising awareness of English language diversity, cultivating appreciation of NNSs' efforts and strivings when speaking English, and developing sensitivity to their needs. Positive attitudes and inclination to make necessary modifications to their regular speech with NSs and highly proficient non-natives are the main prerequisites for a NS to accommodate in ELF communication. Also, in order to successfully employ appropriate accommodative strategies, one needs to be open-minded about various communicative possibilities. The respondents point out that the necessary skills could be primarily acquired through (i) language contact with NNSs and exposure to non-native English speech, and (ii) learning about NNSs' accents, cultures and traditions, their English language education and their experiences of communication with NSs. The latter is a sort of perspective-taking, that is, feeling empathy and reducing prejudices by educating oneself about English NNSs. For this education to take place, the respondents say that they do not have to be in direct contact with NNSs, but can make use of audiovisual media and attend relevant courses, seminars and workshops.

Another important point is that the appropriateness of linguistic accommodation has been questioned for several reasons, the most important being potential communication condescension or overaccommodation, where non-native interlocutors are by default perceived as language learners, linguistically inept and dependent on the NS (cf. Ryan et al. 1986). In the respondents' opinion, linguistic accommodation (and mutual comprehensibility) should not be prioritised to an extent at which NSs actually risk non-native interlocutors being insulted, as they might be English language proficient and/or might not want to be treated differently, in which case (deliberate) "degrading" of English language proficiency on the part of NSs might appear offensive. This actually means that those inclined to accommodate their language occasionally take a risk of insulting their interlocutor, which they were initially going to avoid. Another reason for not approving of linguistic adjustment is offering non-native interlocutors an opportunity to master their English skills, that is, acquire English in its unadapted form. Some respondents are also unwilling to sacrifice high-level English for alleviated intelligibility and reduced communicative effort on the part of NNSs. This indicates that some NSs still have a normative rather than a communicative orientation to interaction and are not really inclined to adjust to what is considered to be usual ELF practice; rather, they expect NNSs to make the necessary adaptations. In addition, some hold that conforming to

NS norms is an important prerequisite for effective communication. The fourth reason underlying NSs' unwillingness to accommodate is "territorial imperative" (Widdowson 1983), when NSs resort to so-called speech maintenance or divergence (Giles and Coupland 1991), that is, purposefully use standard English or even a regional dialect in order to protect their own space and maintain their separate social identity (cf. Zuengler 1991). Conversely, ELF communication is not related to a particular territory or stable speech community, although it has been argued that collaboration, invention and negotiation, which characterise ELF interaction, contribute to the establishment of some sort of "shared affective space" (Seidlhofer 2009a: 206) or temporary "intersociety" (House 2003; cited in Murray 2012: 321). Gu et al. (2014: 139) maintain that participants in ELF discourse, despite their heterogeneity in terms of cultural and linguistic substrata, "reach alignment" and create a multicultural, dynamic in-group identity, that is, establish common attitudes, forms, meanings and conventions. Finally, NSs' reluctance to accommodate their language is also due to the variety of NNSs' lingua-cultural backgrounds, and thus inability to identify "structural commonalities characterizing the LF in its various manifestations" to which to adjust (James 2005: 43). In other words, the respondents underscore that English language diversity prevents reduction to a common ground as each NNS, due to their L1 interference and "their individual degrees of norm-adherence" (Hülmbauer 2009: 325), creates their own version of ELF.

It would be interesting and necessary to investigate the opposite perspective, held by NNSs in terms of how they would like NSs to behave. Do they appreciate, simply do not mind or oppose linguistic accommodation by NSs? Their preferences might be influenced by the level of dedication to the NS ideal and the extent to which they see near-native proficiency as a desired goal. It might be inferred that for those who assume the role of "eternal learners on an interminable journey toward perfection in a target language" (Mauranen 2006: 147) linguistic accommodation on the part of NSs is less acceptable. Besides, some "invested heavily" in English language education (Haberland 2011: 948), which is largely underpinned by the NS ideal, and native-like proficiency is perceived as a status symbol and an added value (cf. Drljača Margić and Vodopija-Krstanović forthcoming).

The pedagogical dimension of linguistic accommodation has been emphasised throughout the study and it attracts opposite perspectives. On the one hand, linguistic adjustment, in terms of a slower speech rate, reduced syntactic complexity and clear enunciation, is seen as an important pedagogical tool for improving NNSs' English language skills. The respondents say that in order to be able to combine elements of a language into new utterances, one needs to able to discern these elements. Those who are teachers of English often

report accommodating because they want learners to feel good about their English and about themselves during and after their learning efforts. On the other hand, in order for NNSs to improve a target language or learn it well, exposure to its natural, complex and unmodified form is perceived as particularly important. As already stated, resistance to linguistic accommodation is often based on the NS's strivings to teach the language and, as a respondent points out, to prepare learners for future conversation in English and motivate them to continue developing their proficiency. What the holders of the two opposite perspectives have in common is the pursuit of one of the four language strategies, namely speech complementarity (Coupland et al. 1988), whereby "speakers emphasize perceived role differences between interlocutors" (Zuengler 1991: 238), such as those between teachers and students. Also, neither group employs "ungrammatical" constructions as this does not provide constructive feedback and may hinder the increase in language proficiency, nor do they correct their interlocutors; rather, they apply the "let it pass" strategy (Firth 1996).

The findings seem to indicate that linguistic accommodation is a result of a conscious endeavour more than generally assumed (cf. Eckert 2001), as the respondents readily describe their behaviour in communication with NNSs. It would be useful, however, to investigate whether NSs who are less educated (in language sciences), who do not speak foreign languages and who are less in contact with NNSs would adopt the same or similar pattern of communication demeanour and whether they would be able to depict their own tendencies and practices. Also, it seems likely that speakers are more conscious of simplifying their native language in communication with NNSs than of, for instance, shifting style in communication with other NSs. It is important to bear in mind, however, that the results do not show the respondents' actual communicative behaviour, but rather their self-reported interactional patterns. Given that it might be difficult for speakers to describe accurately their language use or that they may be reluctant to give a full account of how they behave in intercultural interaction, their self-impression and self-reported use may not entirely match their actual language performance. Sweeney and Zhu (2010), for example, report a discrepancy between NSs' perception of the problems posed by international conversation and their own (non-convergent) behaviour. Specifically, they understand that intercultural communication can cause miscommunication and, accordingly, use some accommodative tools, but these are not employed consistently and even occasionally result in divergence.

The results of the study go in favour of the theory suggesting that ELF is created in situ (cf. Hülmbauer 2009; Jenkins 2012). Rather than being an

"established variety" (Matsuda and Friedrich 2012), it "is in constant flux, involving different constellations of speakers of diverse individual Englishes in every single interaction" (Meierkord 2004: 115). The respondents do not think that ELF should or could be learned (in the conventional sense) as it is "developing and ever-changing" (230). This implies that participants in ELF interaction do not only create ELF on the spot but also learn it on the spot. Taking part in ELF communication, hence, does not involve pre-learning "a fixed set of rules" (86); rather, as the respondents explain, it involves adapting language while communicating to respond to the immediate communicative context. It also involves developing certain skills and traits as well as raising awareness and acquiring knowledge that can help one be more efficient on the spot.

6 Conclusion

The respondents accommodate their language both for instrumental and affective reasons, that is, to ensure intelligibility, on the one hand, and to show courtesy and build rapport with their interlocutors, on the other. Although this paper did not initially take accommodative methods as repair strategies (cf. Kaur 2010; Mauranen 2006; Watterson 2008) employed to remedy communication difficulties, but rather as strategies used for preventing the need for repair (cf. Cogo and Pitzl 2016), it is an irrefutable fact that the tools mentioned in the paper are also applied to overcome miscommunication. In other words, as the participants themselves put it, alignment strategies are adopted both to prevent and to fix misunderstandings. Besides, as Kaur (2011a: 2706) points out, self-repair in ELF does not only refer to fixing things but also to making things transparent and precise "so that nothing goes wrong in the first place" and that interlocutors do not need to ask for clarification.

    This study does not show linguistic accommodation in practice. The reported behaviour, as well as a desire to improve it, however, corresponds with the collaborative aspect of ELF communication. The study reveals NSs' awareness of the situational appropriacy of different English realisations and of various adjustment mechanisms that are used in order to arrive at shared understanding in international communication. It also shows their inclination and prevailingly positive attitudes towards linguistic accommodation. Finally, it reveals NSs' critical stance towards the implications arising from the use or lack of employment of different accommodative strategies. Research on attitudes towards different English language varieties (e.g. Drljača Margić and

Širola 2014) shows that positive attitudes and open-mindedness usually come with awareness of and familiarity with English language diversity. In a similar vein, NSs' awareness and positive attitudes revealed through this study are something to build on when it comes to their future (accommodative) behaviour in ELF communication.

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Bionote

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