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# Translators and interpreters' voice on the spread of English as a lingua franca in Italy

## La percezione di interpreti e traduttori sulla diffusione dell'inglese lingua franca in Italia

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**Abstract:** This paper presents the results of an online survey on the spread of ELF in the translation and interpreting (T&I) industry in Italy. It follows previous perception studies based on a limited number of ad-hoc interviews or broader surveys including unsolicited comments on ELF. This study is the first attempt to carry out a large-scale, online survey among professional translators and interpreters specifically to analyze how they perceive the effects of the increasing use of English by non-native speakers and the resulting consequences on their job. A total of 247 T&I professionals took part in the survey, answering questions about their professional profile, ELF-related features found in source texts, the resulting strategies and solutions adopted to deal with them, and the future developments of T&I. Overall, several challenges are voiced by survey participants, from greater comprehension difficulties to fewer jobs, thus confirming the results of previous studies. However, ELF use also seems to provide new opportunities in more specialized settings and enable better communication with a broader client base. In fact, opposite views can be highlighted in most survey items, pointing to the need to increase the awareness of both service users and providers about the positive and negative effects of the global language *par excellence*.

**Keywords:** survey, ELF, translators, interpreters, perception, market development

**Abstract:** In questo articolo si presentano i risultati di un sondaggio online sulla diffusione dell'inglese lingua franca (ELF) nel settore della traduzione e dell'interpretazione (T&I) in Italia, sulla scia di altre ricerche svolte precedentemente ma basate su un numero ristretto di interviste ad-hoc o sull'analisi di commenti spontanei relativi a ELF nell'ambito di inchieste più generiche. In questo studio ci

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si è proposti di svolgere un sondaggio online su ampia scala, coinvolgendo i professionisti della traduzione e dell'interpretazione, con l'obiettivo specifico di analizzare la loro percezione degli effetti del crescente uso di ELF e le possibili conseguenze sulla loro professione. Al sondaggio hanno risposto 247 professionisti, fornendo informazioni sul loro profilo professionale, sulle caratteristiche di ELF riscontrate nei testi di partenza, nonché le strategie e soluzioni adottate per gestirle al meglio, e sugli sviluppi futuri del mondo T&I. In generale, dalle risposte emergono diverse sfide, dalle maggiori difficoltà di comprensione dei testi di partenza alla riduzione degli incarichi di lavoro, a conferma di quanto visto in studi precedenti. Ciononostante, ELF sembra aprire la strada anche a nuove opportunità in alcuni settori specializzati e favorire una comunicazione migliore con un portafoglio clienti molto più ampio. Di fatto, nella maggior parte dei quesiti del sondaggio si rilevano percezioni contrapposte, segnalando per certi versi la necessità di una maggiore consapevolezza degli effetti sia negativi sia positivi della lingua globale per eccellenza.

**Parole chiave:** sondaggio, ELF, traduttori, interpreti, percezione, sviluppo del mercato

## 1 We have found the enemy (or not?) and it is called ELF

The spread of English as a lingua franca (ELF) has opened up communication possibilities to an unprecedented scale with unquestionable advantages. It has encouraged a reconceptualization of second language proficiency for language learners, shifting the focus from native-like accuracy and errors to intelligibility and accommodation strategies (House 2003; Jenkins 2007; Mauranen 2012; Seidlhofer 2011). Recently, ELF has been redefined as an emergent and variable (multi)lingua franca “with its ‘online’ discovery of what is shared, and its co-construction including what is not shared from the start” (Jenkins 2015: 76), thus embracing the idea that multilingualism also plays an essential role in ELF communication.

However, when it comes to *mediated* communication, be it through translation or interpreting, the same kind of meaning co-construction may not be readily possible. In fact, translators and interpreters undergo different constraints in terms of time (to understand the source message and deliver the target message) and in terms of access to the source text producer (depending on the translation mode involved). As a matter of fact, the global use of English has raised a number of challenges and is perceived not necessarily as an opportunity but also as a threat in

the translation and interpreting (T&I) industry (Albl-Mikasa 2014; Bendazzoli 2017; Taviano 2013). According to T&I scholars who have studied how professional interpreters and translators perceive this phenomenon (e.g., Albl-Mikasa 2010; Chang and Wu 2014; Gentile and Albl-Mikasa 2017), serious concern about negative effects on working conditions, professional status, and communication quality is voiced across markets. More specifically, conference interpreters lament that an increased comprehension and production effort is needed to successfully respond to the challenges raised by ELF speakers in interpreter-mediated communication, such as unexpected patterns in language use and heavily accented pronunciation (Albl-Mikasa 2010). On the other hand, for many conference speakers ELF represents the preferred option even when interpreting services are available (Tieber 2017), with a consequent reduction in interpreting assignments. It could be argued that “ELF and conference interpreting compete with one another, as they can be seen as two means to the same end” (Tieber 2017: 44), though in each of the two options communication is performed under fundamentally different conditions. This worry seems to be particularly relevant to the European T&I market, as highlighted in a global survey on interpreters’ professional status (Gentile 2016) in which ELF-related issues were mentioned even without being explicitly addressed in the questions. The analysis of these unsolicited comments ( $n = 55$ ) points to three main critical effects (Gentile and Albl-Mikasa 2017): shrinking markets, a decline in interpreter status, and a general impoverishment of communication.<sup>1</sup> Similar drawbacks were also found in an interview-based study among 10 conference interpreters in Taiwan (Chang and We 2014), with particular reference to the challenges posed by accented English, source speakers’ mistakes, mispronunciation of technical terms and sudden change of language choice.

It is clear that as a global phenomenon the use of ELF has consequences across markets all over the world. Following Chang and We’s call “to explore its effects on individual markets, and piece together a more complete picture so as to help interpreters usher in the brave new world of ELF at international conferences” (Chang and We 2014: 187), the present study aims to specifically investigate the perceived effects of ELF on the T&I industry but focusing on the Italian market and on a larger sample of T&I professionals, including both interpreters and translators. In line with House (2013), the objective is to deepen our understanding of the challenges at stake and, as it turns out, unveil new, somewhat unexpected opportunities.

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<sup>1</sup> Further hindrances are the growing use of technologies (for remote interpreting and machine translation) and the reduced profitability of some language combinations.

## 2 Questionnaire design and administration

An online questionnaire (in Italian) was designed to find out more about the perceived effects of the spread of ELF on the T&I industry in Italy. In addition to being inspired by the previous surveys mentioned earlier, a first set of questions was piloted among a small group ( $n = 14$ ) of T&I experts and non-experts. The questionnaire was also designed keeping in mind that T&I professionals are often under time pressure, therefore an attempt was made to streamline the survey items as much as possible.

The final questionnaire was structured into three sections (see Appendix). Section 1 provides a brief description of the study and only requires the survey participant to enter their e-mail address. Section 2 includes six questions on the professional profile of survey participants. Finally, Section 3 includes four questions about ELF-related issues. In particular, the first question in this section enquires into whether the spread of ELF has had any consequences on respondents' professional activity with room for free comments. The second question concerns the possible existence of specific features of ELF affecting translation and interpreting jobs, i.e., making these jobs easier or more difficult, and the resulting strategies adopted by respondents. The third question is about the respondents' view of the future of their profession given the seemingly constant spread of ELF. In the last question, respondents are asked to indicate whether they have taken part in any kind of initiative relating to ELF (e.g., training seminars, conferences, etc.) to verify to what extent respondents have some background knowledge of this phenomenon, beyond their personal perception in the field. Finally, the survey also includes two extra questions at the end: one is an open question for any additional comment on the issues addressed in the survey and on the questionnaire itself. In the last item, survey participants can select the option of receiving a final report on the results of the survey.

The survey was administered through Google Form, i.e., a survey administration app included in the Google Drive office suite. The app makes it possible to download the results into a spreadsheet and provides infographics that are generated automatically. The web link to the online questionnaire was advertised among the members of three major Italian professional associations (AITI, Assointerpreti, ANITI) and other colleagues by word of mouth in early 2017. Additionally, a mailing list of approximately 100 participants in a relevant conference organized at the University of Turin the year before was also used to disseminate the web link. The survey remained accessible until mid-June 2017.

### 3 Results and discussion

In total, 247 respondents completed the survey. Their answers are presented and discussed in the two sub-sections below. Section 3.1 focuses on the questions about respondents' professional profile; Section 3.2 concerns the questions about the spread of ELF.

#### 3.1 Respondents' professional profile

In the first question about the respondents' professional profile, survey participants could select multiple answers from different options: conference interpreter (simultaneous and consecutive interpreting), liaison interpreter, translator, T&I educator, other (to be specified). Figure 1 illustrates the sample composition according to these main categories.

Bearing in mind that each respondent could select more than one answer, the majority selected "translator" (227 answers, nearly 92% of the sample), followed by "conference interpreter" (75 answers, 30% of the sample), "liaison interpreter" (66 answers, nearly 27% of the sample), and "T&I educator" (43 answers, 17% of the sample). The "other" category was also selected by 22 respondents. The jobs specified in this category range from L2 teacher (10) to tourist guide (3), terminologist (2), text reviewer (2), text editor (2), project manager (1), adapter (1), PhD student (1). In general, most subjects fall into more than one category. For instance, out of the 75 subjects who selected "conference interpreter" as their main business, 62 also selected "translator" and only 13 work exclusively as interpreters. A distinction between two general groups, i.e., subjects working as interpreters and subjects not working as interpreters, can nonetheless be made, though it is

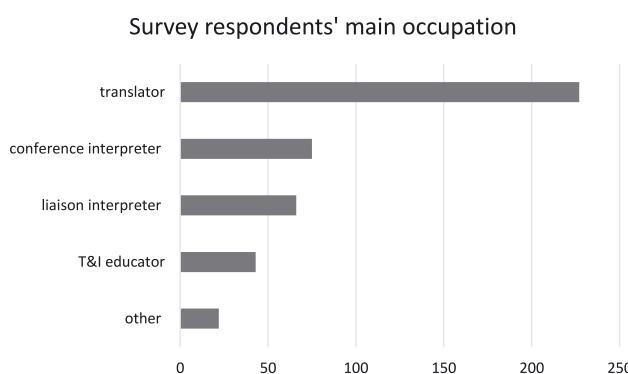


Figure 1: Survey respondents' main occupation.

important to consider that most interpreters also have experience in the translation industry. Overall, it can be argued that the sample composition is not excessively unbalanced, in that respondents with experience in translation only are 58%, while respondents with experience in interpreting (alone or along with translation) are 42%.

Although the number of T&I professionals under consideration in the present survey (i.e., 247) may not be statistically representative of the total number of T&I professionals currently active in Italy, the final sample is nevertheless much larger than what can be found in previous studies. Three main factors contributed to achieving such a wide response. First, being an in-group member myself allowed me to disseminate the survey initially to an easy-to-reach sampling frame in order to pilot the questionnaire and then to promote it at large. Second, the support provided by some of the main T&I professional associations in Italy made it possible to reach a considerable number of professionals. A small conference about ELF and T&I was organized a few months before and it proved to be an effective networking opportunity. Third, the use of Google Form made it convenient to create, administer, and manage the online survey without the need for specialized IT assistance. On the other hand, there was no way to control for the dissemination of the web link and the survey was openly accessible to anyone who might have come across it, including subjects not involved in the T&I industry as well as T&I professionals without a real interest in providing competent feedback. All the questions in the second section of the questionnaire (i.e., about respondents' professional profile) and the last two questions in the third section (i.e., additional comments on the topic and on the questionnaire itself, along with the possibility of receiving a final report) were specifically designed to counter such limitations.

### 3.1.1 Working languages

Survey respondents had to specify their working languages according to AIIC's classification system.<sup>2</sup> In total, 13 different languages are classed as language A (i.e., one's native language): Albanian, Bulgarian, Danish, English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Lithuanian, Portuguese, Russian, Slovenian, and Spanish. As expected, since the survey was disseminated especially among professionals based in Italy, the most represented language A is Italian with 218 answers (nearly 90 %), including 34 bilingual respondents whose other A languages paired with Italian are English (15), German (6), French (4), Spanish (4),

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<sup>2</sup> Language A for one's native language; language B for one's active language; language C for one's passive language.

Portuguese (2), Albanian (1), Japanese (1) and Slovenian (1). The second most represented language A in the population under consideration is English with 26 answers, including 15 bilingual subjects with Italian, three with French, one with Portuguese and one with Danish. The third language A indicated by survey respondents is French (13 answers). Moving to respondents' active working languages (i.e., their B languages), 15 languages are included in this category: Arabic, Chinese, Dutch, English, French, German, Greek, Italian, Italian Sign Language, Japanese, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. The most represented active working language is English (144 answers). Next, there are German (33), Spanish (29), and French (25). Finally, in terms of passive working languages, i.e., C languages, 15 languages are mentioned by survey respondents (Arabic, Chinese, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Farsi, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Latvian, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Slovak, and Spanish). In this category of working languages, French has the lion's share with 84 responses, followed by English (63), German (49), and Spanish (32). Figure 2 illustrates the results concerning only the English language broken down by respondents' main occupation.

In the population under examination, English is equally distributed as a working language among interpreters and non-interpreters. Only a minority has English as their language A, while most subjects have English as an active working language. There is just one exception, as few interpreters have English as a passive language only, whereas this is not the case for translators (6% vs. 20%, respectively), which mirrors typical working standards (in private markets interpreters are normally expected to work bidirectionally, i.e., from and into their working languages, whereas translators are generally expected to work into their native language). Only 14 respondents (6%) do not have English as a working language,

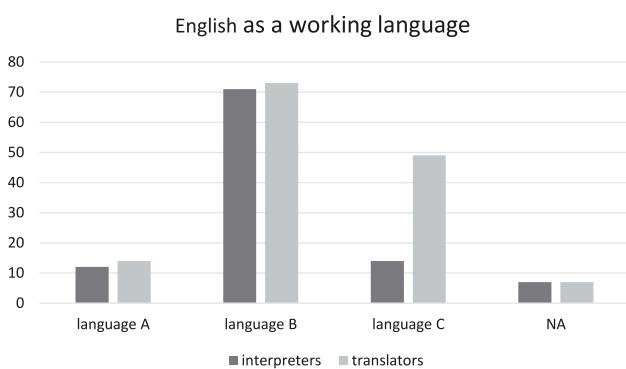


Figure 2: Distribution of English as a working language among survey respondents.

but they were nonetheless encouraged to complete the survey as the spread of ELF is likely to have a global effect on T&I.

Overall, Italian–English is the most represented language combination among respondents, though many more languages are present (up to 20), thus the target population reached through the online questionnaire is consistent with the aim of the survey.

### 3.1.2 Experience

The next two questions concern the length of T&I experience in terms of years and in terms of working days (for interpreters only). The population under consideration shows different degrees of work experience in the T&I industry, ranging from subjects at the early stages of their career to well-established professionals with 30+ years of experience. Looking at the distribution of the answers, it was possible to group the respondents into five different levels: less than five years, between 5 and 10 years, between 11 and 20 years, between 21 and 30 years, and more than 30 years of experience. Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of the respondents' years of experience according to such levels.

The sample average is 18 years. Although no statistical measurements have been made, Figure 3 shows a typical Gaussian distribution around the average value, thus confirming that the sample is well represented in terms of professional experience, too.

The respondents with experience in interpreting were also asked to specify the overall number of working days as interpreters, so as to obtain more detailed information on the composition of this sub-sample of the population. To this end, they could select one of the following options: less than 50 days, between 51 and

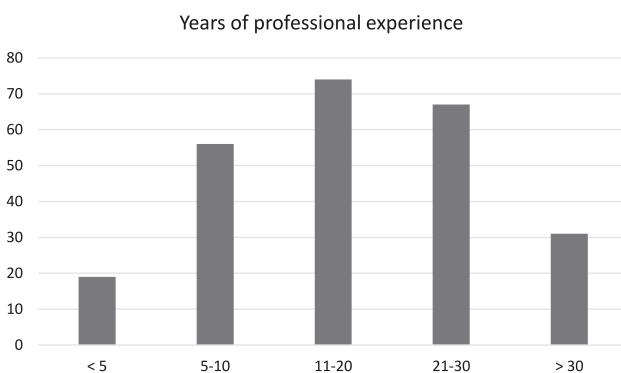


Figure 3: Survey respondents' professional experience (in years).

150 days, between 151 and 500 days, more than 500 days.<sup>3</sup> More than 40% of the interpreters involved in the survey are still in the initial stage of their career. However, this is counterbalanced by the number of respondents with longer experience: one-fourth of this sub-sample worked more than 500 days and 14 subjects selected the third option (151–500 days), thus the subjects with considerable work experience as interpreters account for 37.5 % of the population taken into account. The overall picture resulting from this specific question about interpreting experience is illustrated in Figure 4.

### 3.1.3 Professional associations and reference markets

The last two questions in this section are about respondents' membership to relevant professional associations and reference market. Both questions provided some ready-made answers along with "other" and room to specify. It was possible to select more than one answer.

A minority of survey participants are not members of any association (13%). The most represented association is AITI with 163 answers (66%), followed by ANITI with 29 answers (12%), Assointerpreti with 14 answers (6%), and AIIC with six answers (2%).<sup>4</sup> These are the options that were prompted in the survey. However, many more associations are mentioned by 60 respondents in the "other" category. The most common are ATA, BDÜ, ITI, and TradInFo.<sup>5</sup>

The last question in this section of the survey looks at the reference market. It includes two ready-made answers, i.e., local market (Italy), EU institutions, along with an open option to be specified. The majority of survey respondents are active in the Italian market (75.5%) and only 22 (9%) work for EU institutions. The open option collected a wide range of reference markets, particularly there are references to specific European countries and more general references to international clients in and beyond Europe.

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<sup>3</sup> Note that 19 respondents who identified themselves only as "translators" also answered this question. It is not possible to establish whether they also had interpreting experience or they referred to their translation experience. Their answers have been discarded.

<sup>4</sup> AITI is the *Associazione Italiana Traduttori e Interpreti*; ANITI is the *Associazione Nazionale Italiana Traduttori e Interpreti*; Assointerpreti is an Italian professional association for conference interpreters only; AIIC is the International Association of Conference Interpreters.

<sup>5</sup> ATA is the American Translators Association; BDÜ is the Federal Association of Interpreters and Translators in Germany; ITI is the Institute of Translation & Interpreting in the UK; TradInFo is an association of translators and interpreters in Italy.

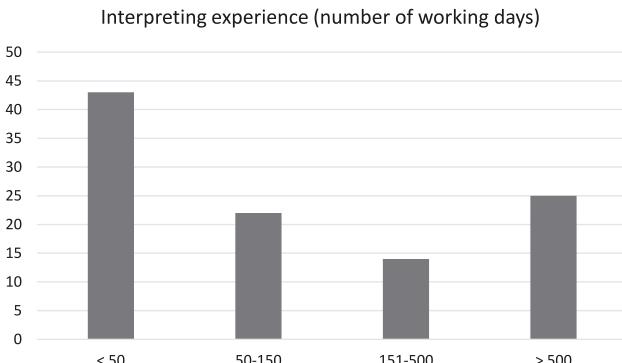


Figure 4: Survey respondents' interpreting experience in terms of working days.

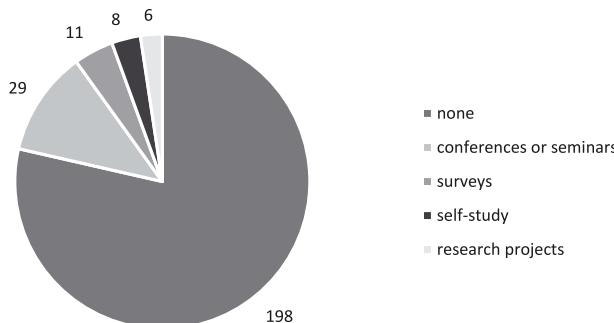
### 3.1.4 Involvement in ELF-related initiatives

The last two questions in the third and final section of the survey are presented here, as they contribute to completing the general profile of the professionals who took part in the study. One question is about respondents' possible involvement in other initiatives concerning ELF and T&I so as to verify whether they had any previous chances to increase their awareness of the role of ELF and its features. Respondents could select different options, such as specific training courses, conferences or seminars, research projects, surveys, none, and other. The vast majority of survey respondents (80%) did not take part in any other initiative concerning ELF and T&I before the present study. Only 29 respondents attended conferences or seminars about this topic, 11 subjects took part in other surveys, eight had already addressed this topic in self-study activities (specified in the "other" category), and six were involved in research projects. Figure 5 illustrates the distribution of the answers provided by survey participants in relation to their previous participation in ELF-related activities.

The last question is a closed question about survey participants' interest in receiving a final report illustrating the survey results. The vast majority of survey participants (83%) replied that they would like to receive a final report to know more about the results.

All the features presented above confirm that the target population sample represented in the present survey is consistent with the aim of the study. Therefore, it can be assumed that the answers obtained in the subsequent section about ELF and T&I were provided genuinely by competent respondents. The fact that 80% of survey participants had never been involved in any ELF-related initiatives before might also be indicative of their low level of meta-awareness with respect to ELF. Hopefully, the present survey has pushed them to internalize and reflect more on

Respondents' participation in other ELF-related initiatives

**Figure 5:** Survey respondents' participation in previous ELF-related initiatives.

the new requirements for T&I professionals who have to cope with ELF-related challenges.

## 3.2 ELF and T&I

The following sub-sections present the results obtained in the third part of the questionnaire specifically focused on ELF and T&I.

### 3.2.1 Perceived effects of ELF on T&I

The first question in the ELF-related section of the survey is a closed question about the possible occurrence of positive or negative consequences, if any, on one's T&I business due to the spread of ELF. The respondents could select more than one option and the final result is a pretty even distribution of the answers. For 87 respondents (35%) the spread of ELF had no consequences at all on their professional practice. On the other hand, 60 respondents (24%) indicate positive consequences, whereas 70 respondents (28%) point to negative consequences. A smaller number of survey participants (29, i.e., 12%) ticked both positive and negative consequences. Only one participant did not provide any answer.

Among those who do not perceive any particular consequence, only one-third do not have English as a working language and there is an even distribution among the different working language types (i.e., English as language A, B or C). This group of respondents includes more translators (60%) than interpreters. However, 36 translators and 15 interpreters in this group (i.e., 52 out of 87) did answer the following question about the perceived features of ELF making it easier or more

challenging to translate or interpret from ELF, thus further reducing the number of professionals for whom there are no particular consequences relating to the spread of ELF.

Whether positive or negative, the respondents were also asked to provide more details about the ELF-induced effects on their job. Though some of these are more specific to either translation or interpreting, they have been grouped together as most interpreters among the respondents also work as translators and their comments often overlap or refer to both interpreting and translation jobs.

Considering the comments provided to explain what kind of positive or negative consequences ELF may have had, it is interesting to notice that there are several opposing remarks, such as an increase versus a decrease of job opportunities. Obviously, this depends on the settings and the genres involved. More opportunities are mentioned within the context of international sports events and conference series (for interpreting); technical manuals, legal documents and agreements, scientific papers, web pages, and e-books (for translation). Revision and text editing jobs are also on the rise. In general, the use of ELF has dramatically increased the amount of texts written in English across genres, which may need to be translated. Conversely, other language combinations tend to be reduced in interpreting, especially German, French and Chinese, and liaison interpreting assignments are less frequent due to the fact that participants apparently manage with their knowledge of English. While revision jobs may be on the rise, these tend to be more demanding (because of lower language quality) and are not paid more despite the greater effort required. Another interesting contrast concerns communication with clients. On the one hand, the use of ELF has expanded the client base and improved exchanges in managing business relations with agencies operating in markets outside Italy. On the other hand, lower language quality in source texts makes it necessary for translators to invest more time in obtaining clarifications. Lower language quality also has a two-fold effect: for some professionals it is easier to understand the source text (especially on account of simpler structure, less lexical variety, and slower speech rate), whereas for others figuring out the correct meaning can be more time consuming (especially when the L1 of the source text producer is not known by the T&I professional). Time is mentioned among both the positive effects, as the use of ELF has speeded up workflow with no need to translate many terms from English into Italian, and the negative effects, as agreeing on terminological choices is not always straightforward due to non-standard use. Finally, the professional status is also subject to a bipolar perception as a result of the spread of ELF. Some respondents highlight that there is greater awareness of the importance of effective communication (which cannot always be achieved with a basic level of English) and that there are more educational opportunities. On the opposite side, some respondents feel now

undervalued and less necessary, and face more competition than ever (especially with improvised T&I service providers and non-native speakers).

### 3.2.2 Perceived features of ELF in T&I

The next questions aim to verify whether T&I professionals find particular features in English source texts making it easier or more difficult to translate/interpret. Survey respondents could select more than one option (no particular feature; features making T&I jobs easier; features making T&I jobs more challenging) and were also asked to provide more details of possible features along with the solutions or techniques adopted to deal with them.

For translation jobs, 85 respondents think that there are no particular features in ELF source texts, 24 find that there are features making it easier to translate from English, whereas 89 find that there are features making it more difficult to translate from English. For 29 participants there are both negative and positive features. As regards interpreting, 44 subjects selected the “no particular feature” option, 12 find it easier and 29 find it more challenging. Mixed answers, i.e., including both negative and positive features in English source texts, are provided by 33 respondents. Figure 6 displays how survey participants responded to the closed question.

Survey respondents’ opinions about potential features of ELF source texts making their job easier or more challenging are mixed, with a slight prevalence of negative views. In some cases, the features perceived in translation match with those perceived in interpreting, and the solutions and techniques adopted can be similar to some extent. The comments provided in this respect can be grouped into broader areas, i.e., source text language quality, target text production, and

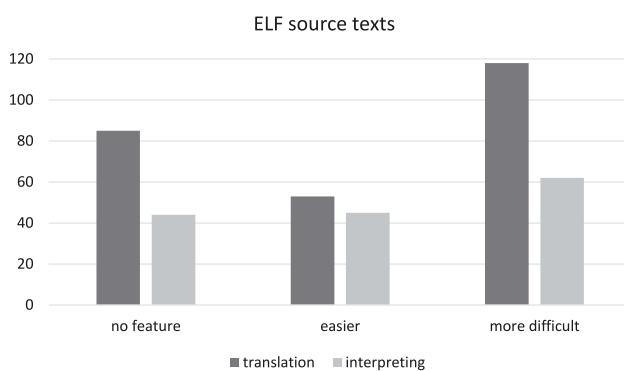


Figure 6: Survey respondents’ view of ELF source text features.

professional practices. All in all, there are more comments about features that make it more challenging to translate and interpret from ELF source texts (twice as much). However, the same features give rise again to opposite effects, as is the case with non-standard use of lexicon, syntax and pronunciation. In fact, this can be an advantage or a disadvantage, depending on whether the T&I professional shares the same L1 of the source text producer, which was identified as “shared languages benefit” (Albl-Mikasa 2013: 105, 2014), and owing to possible simpler syntax and lexicon, limited use of idiomatic expressions, figurative language, proverbs, jokes, culture-specific items, long lists of pre-modifiers (e.g., adjectives), and slower speech rate (in interpreting).

In addition to non-standard use of English, respondents refer to greater difficulties to manage the increasing number of Anglicisms in Italian: for some, a greater effort must be made to avoid using Anglicisms, as they may not be accessible to all the end users; for others, this is an advantage, as no translation effort is needed (or even required by clients). Yet, inconsistencies are also reported in how English terms are sometimes used by clients, who may even question the standard use, in that it does not match their own lingo (e.g., “legal seat” instead of “registered office” for “*sede legale*”). For some respondents, it is not always clear to what extent fidelity to the source text must be maintained since the source text producer is likely to be a non-native speaker.

It seems that the notion of native-like proficiency does not apply to an increasingly larger part of the source texts and speeches T&I professionals are now confronted with and that a sort of new awareness is essential to better manage the hybrid and creative nature of ELF (Mauranen 2012; Taviano 2010) as used by diverse, multilingual and possibly transient communities (Mortensen 2017). There are nonetheless shared terminology and standards in continental Europe (e.g., in legal texts), as well as greater availability of support materials and more networking opportunities that can reduce the time needed for preparation or research. Conversely, more time is required for more demanding revision/editing work due to inaccurate translations and to the large variation in how English terms are used in other languages and by different age groups. Finally, the abundant use of Anglicisms in source texts written in languages other than English (e.g., Spanish) requires translators to be familiar with English even when this is not one of their working languages.

### **3.2.3 Solutions and techniques to deal with ELF in source texts**

The last question concerning the perceived advantages and disadvantages of translating and interpreting from ELF is about the resulting solutions and techniques adopted by survey respondents. In total, 85 items were entered for written

translation and 57 items for interpreting.<sup>6</sup> The solutions and techniques highlighted in *translating from ELF* can be sorted into two main areas, i.e., solutions and techniques adopted for understanding the source text and producing the target text, and recommendations for one's professional practice. Below are the entries provided for source text comprehension (C) and target text production (P):

- Reading the source text with the Italian language in mind to unveil the original syntax and meaning (C)
- Careful reading and study of the source text to clarify obscure parts (C)
- Patience and psychology (C)
- Best judgment, common sense (C)
- Looking for the original text initially used to produce the text in English (when the source text is already a translation) (C)
- Omission (in extreme cases) (C+P)
- Use of parallel texts, background information, terminological databanks and corpora (C+P)
- Correcting source text inaccuracies for a flawless target text (C+P)
- Reformulation (almost closer to interpreting approach) (P)
- Simplification (especially text structure and style to the benefit of non-native speakers) (P)
- Explaining terms by adding extra information (in brackets or footnotes) (P)
- Contacting clients, experts or other colleagues to verify appropriateness of target solutions (P)
- Free translation (if the client agrees) (P)
- Searching for native English solutions in online sources (P)
- Chunking of target structure and syntax (P)
- Use of Anglicisms (with explanation in brackets if necessary) (P)

The solutions and techniques relating to professional practice in ELF translation are listed below:

- Refusing an assignment
- Informing the client about the situation at hand
- Obtaining as much information as possible about the source text and the intended end users

The solutions and techniques presented with reference to *interpreting from ELF* can also be related to source text comprehension, target text production, and

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<sup>6</sup> One respondent wrote “nothing can be done”.

professional practices prior to an assignment. These are the solutions and techniques adopted for source text comprehension (C) and target text production (P):

- Longer *décalage* (C)<sup>7</sup>
- Omission (of incomprehensible parts with subsequent integration where possible) (C+P)
- Greater reliance on contextual and visual information (e.g., slides), when available (C)
- Asking a speaker to repeat (in liaison interpreting) (C)
- In extreme cases, informing the service users about possible ambiguities or challenges to comprehension (e.g., prompting explicit comments such as “if the interpreter could understand well the English language spoken by this speaker...”) (C)
- Increased concentration and attention (C+P)
- Common sense and patience (C+P)
- Simplification (P)
- Generalization (P)
- Summarizing (P)
- Reformulating (P)
- Ensuring a higher level of accuracy in (Italian) target texts (P)
- Increased effort to ensure coherence (P)
- Speaking slowly, articulating well, using simple terms (P)
- Using Anglicisms and English terms belonging to the client’s industry jargon (P)

Finally, these are the solutions and techniques relating to professional practice and usually adopted prior to an interpreting assignment:

- Maximum preparation on the topic, lifelong learning
- Contacting clients for support and clarifications
- Extra practice
- Fine-tuning, increasing one’s exposure to non-native speakers (e.g., organizing a briefing session or listening to speakers online)

Considering the strategies mentioned for translation, most strategies can in fact be applied to any kind of translation job. There is possibly more emphasis on how carefully the source text must be processed, above all keeping in mind the L1 of the author. Moreover, the use of meta-comments (e.g., footnotes) and frequent exchanges with the client are also listed among the techniques. Moving to interpreting, again the solutions and techniques mentioned do not differ from

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<sup>7</sup> Or ear-voice span, i.e., the time lag between the source text input and the interpreter’s output.

what one would expect of professional interpreters dealing with challenging source speeches in general. Special emphasis is nonetheless put on reliance on extra textual information, longer *décalage* in simultaneous interpreting and, as a last resort solution, explicitly informing the audience that the non-standard English of a presenter is hardly understandable. Some interesting professional practices are indicated in preparation to an assignment, e.g., fine-tuning with online videos and increasing familiarity with the mistakes or non-standard use of the language by non-native speakers, in line with the results obtained by Chang and Wu (2014).

### 3.2.4 The future of T&I

The last question strictly relevant to ELF in T&I is an open question about the future of the T&I industry and its professionals. In total, 133 responses were collected from the 247 respondents. These include observations that range from negative to positive prospects for T&I, along with expected or necessary developments of both T&I and the English language itself used as a lingua franca. Although a reduction of job opportunities is mentioned directly or indirectly in 30% of the reactions, these are manifold and are reported below in detail.

Negative prospects:

- The need for T&I professionals will decrease
- Fewer interpreting jobs
- Fewer liaison interpreting jobs
- Fewer T&I jobs from other languages
- Translators will be replaced by machines, MT makes one feel superfluous
- There will be a general flattening
- Lower quality in source texts
- Translation jobs into English will be increasingly assigned to would-be translators and not to professional translators
- Lower fees
- T&I will be more complex and less recognized as a profession
- English will be taken for granted and T&I professionals will need to specialize in other languages
- More competition and lower quality
- Interpreters, and not translators, will be made redundant
- Interpreting from/into English will disappear
- It will be a disaster
- Apocalypse

Positive prospects:

- The need for T&I professionals will increase
- More T&I jobs opportunities in the legal and financial sector
- Interpreters will always be needed in that precision and competence make a difference
- Source texts and speeches will become more ambiguous due to the increasing presence of non-standard forms. It will not be possible to process these correctly just relying on Machine Translation. The role of T&I professionals will be crucial
- New languages will emerge and T&I professionals will be needed
- T&I professionals working only with English will become increasingly specialized and have fewer (enlightened) clients, who will demand new services requiring skills they will be willing to value and pay for

Expected or necessary developments in the T&I industry:

- Passive working languages should be turned active
- T&I professionals will have to be increasingly specialized
- Interpreting services will be provided more for political than practical reasons
- Substantial changes for specialized and technical translators, minor consequences for literary translators and translators for publishing houses
- More opportunities for young professionals with limited skills
- At the moment in Italy there is still good demand for T&I services from English into Italian given the general low English language proficiency of Italian people. However, in the future the language proficiency is likely to increase
- All translators will need to have English among their working languages
- No big changes
- Well written texts will always be needed
- In Italian technical translation it is increasingly unnecessary to provide explanations in brackets as English terms are widely used and known
- T&I will always be necessary in specialized settings, though the impact of new technologies will be considerable
- More efforts will be necessary to prepare an interpreting session, and more time will be spent on a translation (e.g., to understand the source text and to ask for clarifications)
- T&I jobs will become more complex
- More revision and post-editing jobs
- There will be more demand for *service* translations
- Fewer translation jobs from English and more translation jobs from German
- More T&I jobs in English to the detriment of other languages such as German
- It will be fundamental to know speakers' L1 to correctly understand their English

- The role of T&I professionals will have to be emphasized *vis-à-vis* the extensive use of English terms (in other languages) in a confusing and ambiguous way

Expected or necessary developments in the English language and its use as a lingua franca:

- ELF could generate a new Babel if it adjusts to the myriad of settings and situations in which it is used. In such a case, T&I professionals will have to specialize in one of the resulting micro-languages
- Hybrid languages will be spoken with great difficulties to understand calques and lexical ambiguities (this is already the case in EU institutions)
- A new variety of English will be spoken and will have to be learned just like other existing varieties of English
- A weakening of the English language itself as a simpler, less correct form becomes the standard
- The English language will become simpler in terms of grammar and syntax
- Communication processes will become more standardized
- More tolerance for language mistakes
- More use of Anglicisms in other languages, though the meaning may not always match
- As long as foreign languages are badly taught in Italy, T&I professionals will always be needed
- ELF will be useful to open people's mind and get exposed to new cultures
- More limited linguistic regimes in institutional settings may deprive some participants of their right to participate actively and fully in the debates
- There will be more opportunities to communicate with other people

Overall, the future prospects of T&I *vis-à-vis* the constant spread of ELF are again a mixture of positive and negative developments. Opposing prospects (e.g., fewer jobs vs. more jobs) are mentioned by different respondents, obviously influenced by each individual's experience. There are more negative than positive considerations, but what seems to emerge is that T&I professionals should also be ready to provide new services (e.g., in post-editing and language enhancement) and develop further competencies “as a communication facilitator” to maintain “an ‘edge’ over the general audience” (Chang and Wu 2014: 185). Indeed, high professional standards will always make a difference, even in a world where everybody can manage, somehow, to get their message across through the medium of English. In the respondents' opinion, specialized sectors and high-level settings will always demand well-drafted texts and accurate communication. The potential development of ELF and its implications, along with the growing presence of Anglicisms in other languages may

result in new, multiple varieties with greater variation in meaning, depending on the context of use of a certain term in increasingly fragmented communities of practice.

### 3.2.5 Additional comments on ELF in T&I and this survey

The final question in the survey is an open question where respondents are invited to add any additional comments about the topic under discussion and the questionnaire itself. This last question obtained 28 responses. These revolve around three main threads, namely the topic under discussion, further reflections on the role of English as a global language, and the survey itself.

The topic under discussion raised considerable interest among survey participants, who would welcome more seminars and opportunities to swap experience, and more research on the features of ELF used in interpreter-mediated settings. Perceptions are likely to differ depending on whether an interpreter works as a freelance or staff interpreter (with a permanent position). Freelancers would be more worried owing to evidence of a declining market, whereas staff interpreters would perceive the spread of ELF as an unstoppable trend with various consequences on interpreting *practice*. For a respondent ELF would be even exploited by T&I agencies to make more profit to the detriment of other languages. On the other hand, there is consensus on the fact that T&I still make sense in situations where precision, accuracy, and quality are needed.

As regards English as a global language, the crucial role of ELF is acknowledged in critical situations involving migrant people and in speeding up communication. However, some fear the constant Anglicization of the other languages with consequent domain loss, while English will be increasingly influenced by other languages. Relying too much on one's L1 when speaking English is seen as a critical limitation of today's clients, and better L2 education is called for.

Finally, the few comments about the questionnaire itself highlight that it was clear and interesting. Only one participant found the questions pretty obvious and one had reservations on the general aim of the whole study. The respondents' feedback to the issue under examination and the questionnaire itself is encouraging and mirrors the growing interest in this research area.

## 4 Conclusions

The present study discusses the results obtained from an online questionnaire-based survey about the effects of ELF on the T&I industry in Italy. In total, 247 T&I professionals took part in the survey, including translators and interpreters. First,

their professional profile is analyzed (Section 3.1) in terms of main occupation (most interpreters also work as translators), working languages (Italian–English is the main language combination among the sample population), years of experience (18 on average), working days (for interpreters only), membership to professional associations and reference market. Overall, the sample composition appears to be well-balanced and consistent with the aim of the study. Survey participants were also asked to provide details of previous initiatives relating to ELF they might have experienced. In fact, the present survey was the first chance to reflect on ELF for the vast majority of respondents. They certainly had direct experience of the relevant effects, but have limited awareness of how this phenomenon has been studied by researchers and expressed interest in more learning opportunities. Next, the analysis is focused on the perceived effects of ELF on T&I (Section 3.2.1), its features (Section 3.2.2), and the solutions adopted to deal with ELF in source texts (Section 3.2.3). A bipolar perception emerges from respondents' comments, as they point to both opportunities (e.g., more jobs, more efficient communication, faster workflow, easier assignments) and drawbacks (e.g., fewer jobs, source text comprehension difficulties due to non-standard pronunciation or syntax, more complex assignments, extensive and non-standard use of Anglicisms in other languages). The reported strategies to deal with ELF-related obstacles do not differ from ordinary strategies employed to deal with challenging T&I assignments, but special attention is given to preparation, background knowledge, the role of source text producers' L1 and the provision of explicit information about ELF-related difficulties. The final question (Section 3.2.4) on the future of T&I also highlights contrasting prospects (e.g., more vs. less need for T&I services), but some respondents point out that greater specialization will be a key factor to providing high quality T&I services that will make a difference in communication even among ELF users. It is also clear that greater awareness of the underlying challenges and of the characteristics of ELF may be helpful to better inform all the stakeholders (T&I professionals, but also educators, clients and service users) in a way that can bring more opportunities than losses. Along these lines, the present survey is meant to obtain a fuller appreciation of the two sides of ELF in mediated communication.

## Appendix

The questionnaire was administered in Italian through Google Forms. Below is a translation of the questions into English (note that the layout of the questions is considerably different online, including lists of options to be ticked, dropdown menus, open-ended text boxes, etc.).

## Section 1

Title:

English lingua franca and interpreting/translation

Description:

This survey is open to T&I professionals working in Italy (and not only there).

The answers will be treated anonymously.

Objective of the study:

To understand the effects that the increasing use of English among non-native speakers (lingua franca) is having on the translation and interpreting industry.

NB:

- Even those who do not have English as their working language can answer the questions.
- The questionnaire includes six questions on your professional profile and five questions on English lingua franca which can be answered in Italian or any other language.
- It is NOT possible to save the answers and complete the questionnaire at different times (minimum time needed to complete the survey: 10 min).

The online questionnaire is available until 15 June 2017, you are welcome to circulate it among colleagues. For more information, please contact: Claudio Bendazzoli, University of Turin, School of Management and Economics (E-mail: [claudio.bendazzoli@unito.it](mailto:claudio.bendazzoli@unito.it)). Thank you very much for your help!

1. Your email address

## Section 2: Professional profile

2. Main business (if you select “other” please specify):

Conference interpreter (simultaneous and consecutive)  
Liaison interpreter (short consecutive/dialogue interpreting)  
Translator  
Translation/interpretation trainer  
Other ...

3. Working languages (AIIC classification)\*

\*Language A = native speaker; Language B = active language (you are able to translate/interpret both FROM and INTO this foreign language); Language

C = passive language (you are only able to translate/interpret FROM this foreign language).

[list of languages is provided]

4. Years of professional experience
5. Working days (ONLY for interpretation assignments)  
<50  
50–150  
151–500  
>500
6. Membership in professional associations  
AIIC  
AITI  
ANITI  
Assointerpreti  
INTERMED  
No association  
Other ...
7. Professional context in which you work  
Local market (Italy)  
EU institutions  
Other ...

### **Section 3: English lingua franca**

English is increasingly used by non-native speakers to communicate in different contexts.

8. This spread of English lingua franca (multiple responses can be selected):  
Has had POSITIVE consequences on your professional activity\*  
Has had NO EFFECTS on your professional activity  
Has had NEGATIVE consequences on your professional activity\*\*

\* If it has had positive consequences, can you specify which ones?

\*\*If it has had negative consequences, can you specify which ones?

9. Are there any particular characteristics of English as a lingua franca that you find during your translation/interpretation assignments?

– When performing (written) translation assignments from English:

No special features

Features that make it EASIER to carry out the task\*

Features that make it more DIFFICULT to carry out the task\*\*

\*Can you specify what makes the task easier?

\*\*Can you specify what makes the task more difficult?

Solutions or techniques adopted

– In interpreting from English:

No special features

Features that make it EASIER to carry out the task\*

Features that make it more DIFFICULT to carry out the task\*\*

\*Can you specify what makes the task easier?

\*\*Can you specify what makes the task more difficult?

Solutions or techniques adopted

10. What will be the future development of your profession as a result of the constant spread of English lingua franca? [free text]

11. Have you ever taken part in other initiatives on lingua franca English?

Specific training courses

Conferences / Seminars

Research projects

Surveys

None

Other ...

12. You can use this space for any clarifications, further remarks or comments on the topic of the survey and the questionnaire itself.

13. Would you like to receive a report on the overall results of the survey?

Yes

No

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## Bionote

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