

Again taking a breath and leaning forward may also communicate an involuntary reaction or a desire for a turn. In Western cultures leaning back usually indicates the end of a turn and the wait for an answer.

As far as head movements are concerned, Western participants often nod to show agreement and commitment, and they quickly shake their heads from side to side when they disagree and signal the desire to reply. Participants in cross-cultural encounters should take into account that gestures do not have the same meaning in all cultural codes, and, as already seen in the previous chapters, methods used to show involvement and attention (as well as their opposites) vary across cultures with the possibility of leading to ambiguity and misinterpretations. IMs in particular should be aware and sensitive to the intercultural multi-modal conveyance of the message, considering their own behaviours as well as those of the other participants involved in the interaction, interpreting with caution and without cultural biases what they are observing.

## 5. Conclusions

### 5.1. *Concluding remarks*

This ethnographic research developed from the awareness that ELF in intercultural communication within immigration contexts, especially in southern Italy, need urgent and careful consideration.

The well-known – and almost – collapsing aid system incessantly operating along the Sicilian coasts is only the first and more visible step of a long migratory process which inevitably entails different kinds of communicative contacts taking place between Italian authorities and experts, on the one hand, and asylum seekers and migrants on the other.

This research has actually focused on the investigation of intercultural encounters involving legal and bureaucratic specialized discourse employed in a centre for legal advice of the southern Italy specifically dealing with asylum seekers and refugees, where legal experts operate with the linguistic assistance of intercultural mediators. More precisely, the participants involved in the interactions were speakers from different socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds, using ELF to fulfil their communicative goals.

As a consequence, the specialized discourse conveyed through ELF spoken interactions has been here explored by means of a novel phonopragmatic approach, ultimately aimed at identifying ‘gatekeeping’ asymmetries between the interactants in immigration domains, in terms of power-status arrangements and conversational leading roles.

Actually, a crucial research hypothesis is that ELF users involved in intercultural encounters differently appropriate the English language not only according to their own different native linguacultural schemata (Carrell *et al.* 1988), but also to specific pragmalinguistic goals and processes.

More precisely the research objectives concerned the investigation of the spontaneous and natural use of prosodic strategies by ELF speakers from different L1 backgrounds, with the ultimate aim of describing (i) how existing L1 prosodic and acoustic variations (in terms of stress, intonational patterns, speech rate, and disfluency) were redefined in the use of an ELF variation; (ii) to what extent the resulting L1 phonological transfers affected speakers' ELF variations (in terms of phonological phrasing, textual, syntactic and lexical choices); (iii) how meaning, experience and understanding were mediated and cross-culturally constructed to be conveyed in interactions through phonopragmatic strategies; and (iv) the role played by prosody and paralinguistics in the negotiation of speakers' attitudes, emotions, and socio-cultural schemata derived from background interpretative filters.

As a matter of fact, an important theoretical premise to the research is represented by a synergic co-occurrence of perspectives and assumptions that justify the research rationale, i.e. (i) the persistence of 'gatekeeping' asymmetries between the participants in interactions in immigration domains, where achieving successful communication and access to information and opportunities through mutual accommodation strategies appears rather challenging, if not sometimes problematic (Erickson & Shulz 1982; Guido 2008); (ii) the pragmatic implications derived from the Speech Acts Theory (Austin 1962; Searle 1969; 1983) based on the performing of illocutionary intents through the adoption of prosodic and pragmalinguistic strategies; (iii) the interface between the multimodal construction of messages and their perlocutionary effects on receivers from different sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds interacting through their own ELF variations (Guido 2008).

The phonopragmatic approach, therefore, has aimed to explore first of all the possible prosodic and auditory processes involved in such cross-cultural dynamics, with particular attention to the speakers' illocutionary and pragmatic intentions conveyed through speech acts.

For this purpose, the phonopragmatic analysis was applied to a corpus of recorded data collected during spontaneous cross-cultural interactions between asylum-seekers, refugees, language mediators and legal advisors, taking place at a centre for legal counselling and assistance to refugees and involving ELF and Italian Lingua-Franca.

As a result, a qualitative research method (Seliger & Shohamy 1995) was applied to five case studies explored from (i) a register perspective, taking into account lexical, rhetorical and stylistic choices, such as the use of tense and aspect, deontic vs. epistemic modality, conversational hedging,

popularization and simplification of terminology, accommodation strategies; (ii) a phono-prosodic perspective, exploring prosodic parameters (such as pitch level and range, intensity, stressed syllable duration, pauses, speech rate, intonational phrase, and pitch contour) and other paralinguistic and extralinguistic features (such as facial expressions, gestures, posture, eye movements and eye gaze, head and hand movements, voice quality); and (iii) a phonopragmatic perspective, considering and analyzing how the identified phono-linguistic strategies actually match with the speakers' pragmalinguistic goals in the conversation frame, where western perspectives and schemata meet non-western attitudes and viewpoints, often resulting in communication breakdown, or at least persuasive and manipulative attempts by the higher-status participant.

More precisely, spectral, pitch and formant PRAAT analysis (Boersma & Weenink 2014) of conversation turns and acts occurring in mediation processes in immigration settings was here employed by considering phono-prosodic parameters used in different ELF variations.

The objective of the acoustic analysis was to describe (i) how prosody and phonology are influenced by pragmatics and consequently how they affect the speakers' conveyance of intentionality in conversational interactions and the receivers' perception and interpretation process, and (ii) how native-language syntactic and stylistic structures are transferred to the use of ELF variations and to which extent they affect the production and perception of the English language used in intercultural encounters – and, as a consequence, improve or hinder the cross-cultural mediation process.

However, the phonopragmatic and register investigation of utterances and speech acts fulfils its complete task only when the auditory and acoustic evaluation matches the conversation analysis in terms of moves and acts, which may reveal pragmalinguistic power-status and role asymmetries through the imposition of worldviews and schemata.

## **5.2. Future prospects**

The previous five sections have presented a number of case-studies selected from a considerable amount of quantitative data collected on the ELF ethnographic fieldwork described above.

Hence, the organizational structure previously proposed derives from a methodological need for a systematic data management. Yet a data-driven research method inevitably provides a series of information and evaluations that hardly fit a univocal theoretical generalization.

Actually the main purpose of the present study (and probably of those which can derive from it) is to provide an insight into the complex and multifaceted linguistic phenomena related to cross-cultural specialized

settings through the exploration of divergent communication strategies used by ELF users. In addition, such research purpose obviously does not have an end in itself, but rather the main objective is to hypothesize and suggest a procedural communicative framework enabling future intercultural mediators to successfully perform their task.

In order to answer the research objectives and verify the research hypotheses, the case-studies have been selected from a corpus of collected data and thus analysed with the aim of providing a first interpretative phonopragmatic assessment of ELF cross-cultural interactions in specialized immigration domains, namely the legal and welfare ones, exploring linguistic and paralinguistic behaviours and strategies (with constant reference to their pragmatic reasons and intents) actualized by the interacting participants.

The observation process has shown all its crucial importance for the present research since it allows the multiple perspectives of the participants involved in the interactions and their relationships, achieved not only by means of recordings, but also through careful detailed field notes and informal conversations and interactions with the participants.

In an attempt to summarize previous evaluations and considerations it is here proposed a broad outlook on the main linguistic and paralinguistic behaviours which differently emerged from the participants involved in the ELF exchanges taken into consideration.

The most important parameters under examination are here reviewed with the aim of finding possible behavioural patterns which may be recurring, and thus typical of certain groups of ELF users, among the participants encountered during the fieldwork.

In the case-study qualitative analysis, special attention has been paid to cross-cultural behavioural patterns represented by peculiar and common linguistic and paralinguistic attitudes revealed by speakers during their exchanges.

To sum up, it is possible to recognize that linguistic and paralinguistic behaviours in the exchanges here considered as affected by roles and conversational rules.

More precisely, legal advisors still represent the ‘gatekeepers’ who enable and direct the encounter, and their ELF accommodation and adaptation strategies are totally aimed to pragmatic goals of persuading and giving directives.

From a strictly phonological perspective, it should be noticed that the Italian experts and legal advisors met during the fieldwork made no attempt to reproduce the ENL or ESL pronunciation, accent and intonational patterns. Rather they strictly transfer local and native paralinguistic and prosodic tactics to their ELF acts in the attempt to recreate the same pragmatic and perlocutionary effects produced in their own speech community.

As already observed by several researchers, L1 influence on the phonological and phonetic realization depends on L2 competence (cf. e.g. Ueyama 1997; Ueyama & Jun 1998; Jun & Oh 2000; Stella & Gili Fivela 2009; Stella 2010). This is particularly evident when the native phonological system and the L2 one (in this case that of ELF) employ different tonal accents and patterns, especially in marked tonal realizations such as syllable-timing, narrow-contrastive focus and emphasis.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, silence and non-lexical items are totally transferred to ELF spontaneous realizations with the same pragmatic implications of their corresponding employment in the L1.

On the other hand, migrants and asylum seekers represent the most challenging viewpoint in the ELF dimensions of immigration communicative contexts where L1 transfers are not easily recognizable.

More interestingly, data show gender-based variations in the use of linguistic structures (namely verbal, lexical and stylistic ones) as well as in their phonological realizations. Evidently sub-Saharan migrants, coming from ex-British colonies, generally show some degrees of standard pronunciation and suprasegmental patterns, even though dialectological and sociolectal tracts are recognizable (e.g. vowel reduction, inter-dental fricative assimilation, L1 tone influence on English stress).

Therefore, the asylum seekers' more fitting conformity to the standard linguistic and paralinguistic behaviours (especially as far as segmental and suprasegmental variations are concerned) may give rise to misunderstanding episodes which may hinder the successful outcome of the exchange with their Italian interlocutors. As a consequence, mediators are charged with the task of intervening to recover linguistic and paralinguistic misinterpretations, but sometimes they seem to underestimate their important role in cross-cultural triangular interactions.

The mediators observed in this fieldwork were all female under- or post-graduates in foreign languages revealing L1 influences similar to those underlined for the asylum seekers, with rare exceptions due to the attempt of reproducing standard articulatory and intonational English patterns (especially in statements and wh-questions).

To conclude, the phonopragmatic model, here applied to five exemplifying case studies, should be implemented through further research investigation which may entail not only qualitative but also quantitative and statistical analysis of the whole corpus of data collected.

<sup>28</sup> More precisely Stella & Gili Fivela (2009) propose a falling tonal accent (H\*+L) for the description of the question contours and other focalisation processes applied to L2 tonal productions according to different levels of linguistic competence. Nonetheless concepts such as 'interlanguage', 'errors', 'competence' and 'fossilization' are irrelevant for ELF since it may not be considered a 'foreign language' (as extensively pointed out by Jenkins 2006).

Actually, by means of an appropriate tagging practice, data may constitute a corpus of naturally occurring transcribed spoken interaction where phonopragmatic behaviours and patterns are tagged to enable availability and usability. However this challenging operation requires an accurate and meticulous procedure since the extraordinarily creative, unpredictable and variable nature of ELF variations hinders a straightforward and precise categorisation of prosodic, lexical, syntactic and textual features.

Moreover, spontaneous data may be a useful tool for perceptual investigation aimed at verifying – within other speakers' categories, native speakers of English included – what the present research has revealed in terms of speakers' unequal distribution of illocutionary intents and their respective perlocutionary effects on the receivers. In this sense a series of experimental acoustic designs may be suggested to speakers of different linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds to assess and further investigate the phonopragmatic habits and patterns identified through the previous research method.

Probably data concerning language mediators are the most relevant to set the scene for future considerations and insights in the study of intercultural mediation, especially with the aim of suggesting efficient training programmes for future ELF mediators, since they represent, among the participants involved in these interactions, the ones who can be induced to consciously reconsider their linguistic and paralinguistic behaviours.

In this perspective, the professional figure of the mediator may be designed as absolutely equidistant from the migrant (whose real intents and requests he/she is called to understand) and the expert (who is likewise guided to the acceptance of the migrant's own schemata through the mediator's intervention). This triangular disposition of roles and attitudes may be achieved only by means of a proper and effective interdisciplinary training of mediators which can take into account the significant insights and evaluations revealed by the phonopragmatic investigation of ELF encounters.

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