

BELF in the Catalan International Business Context

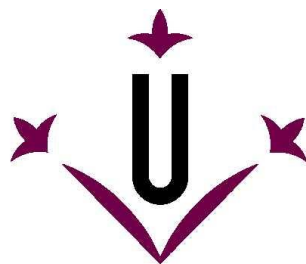
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Abstract

Few people would question that English has become the *de facto* main international language of communication in virtually all fields of human activity in today's increasingly connected world, and furthermore, that it will continue to occupy this status into the near, foreseeable future.

More people than ever collaborate or compete in real time with more other people, on more different kinds of work and from different corners of the planet. As a result, a common shared language is required, and English appears to take this role.

This paper investigates the implications of the appliance of English, and particularly what has been labelled Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF) within the Catalan business environment. The research is an empirical, data-based case study of 27 Catalan and Spanish workers who use English as their international language to conduct business. It attempts to shed some light on the significance of the appliance of BELF on Catalan international business while considering the professionals' use of English and their feelings towards the language.

Results have shown that Catalan international companies use English as their international language, but the English they use is not exactly the variety of English that BELF claims for.

Key words: BELF, ELF, English, lingua franca, business English, companies, Catalan.

1. Introduction

Globalization has totally affected the very nature of the English language, and today, in a globalized world, English has adopted the role of a lingua franca, a language whose ownership is global.

What happens to a language when it goes global? We do not really know. It may look like any other language, only bigger. Or scale may do something new to it. What we do know is that when languages get very small, below a certain level they disappear fast, because there is no community to sustain them. When they get very large, they tend to spread themselves thinly and start diversifying. When they get enormous, and a lion's share of the use is as a lingua franca – this is uncharted territory (Mauranen 2012:1).

The fact that English, as the lingua franca of academia, is spoken by more non-native than native speakers (Jenkins 2011) has led to the hope that it is crucial to manifest its current presence in international context, and the different resources people use in order to communicate with this second language.

Although considerable research has been devoted to second language acquisition, rather less attention has been paid to the actual features that affect communication by non-native speakers of English. In fact, it is only in the last few years that researches have become aware of the reality that nowadays more non-native speakers use English as their language of communication, and this has been such an abrupt change that, as Mauranen (2010) claims, the old assumption that 'good English' equals that of the educated natives is starting to be questioned. As a result, other varieties of English have appeared, being ELF (English as Lingua Franca) the most prominent result of this internationalization in the academic environment.

Thanks to the internationalization of English as a lingua franca, ELF is starting to gain importance in the academic environment. However, in this environment, English is no

longer the preserve of its native speakers but rather, common property of its users (Beneke 1991). This is totally emphasized by what Mauranen (2008:186) points out “International academic communities communicate in largely non-native groups. What counts is clarity, effectiveness and contextual appropriateness of communication. While high academic standards are vital, native-like English is not”. So, ELF considers how to achieve successful communication among non-native speakers without being too much strict to the native norms, allowing ELF users to exploit the language in different ways to suit their own needs (Galloway and Rose 2015). This new situation has also affected the business environment, and when ELF is used in the business domain, it has been labeled BELF, a form of ELF adapted to business communicative situations.

Advancing globalization has also implied some changes in the business environment, resulting in an international corporate world that has meant major changes for internal communication in companies. Cross-border companies want to compete and challenge in the world markets, but the situation becomes much more complicated because this means that people from different nationalities and different mother tongues are after the same objective. For this reason, in this new situation, there is the need of having a common language as a means of communication. Today, such language is English. Although some proposals have been presented concerning ELF, not much research has been focused on its role in the business environment.

This paper attempts to shed some light on the significance of applying BELF on different Catalan companies while considering their actual use and their feelings towards the language.

Before presenting the empirical study, two areas of current literature will be reviewed. First, ELF and its main features and implications will be discussed, and second, BELF, within the wider term of ELF, will be examined in the business environment.

2. Theoretical Background

The fact that English, as the lingua franca of academia, is spoken by more non-native than native speakers (Jenkins 2011) has led to the hope that its crucial to manifest its current presence in the international context. For this reason, in order to analyse and understand the actual use of BELF, aspects of ELF and of the notion of BELF must be taken into consideration.

2.1 English as the Lingua Franca

English has become a global ‘lingua franca’, a unique linguistic phenomenon in history. There have been *lingua francae* before in the past, but this is the first time that one language has spread worldwide throughout all social classes in most societies. In ancient times, scholars around Europe shared their thoughts, discoveries and information using a common lingua franca, Latin. Today in a globalized world, English has been taken as a lingua franca and people use it in a variety of different contexts: to do business, to share knowledge or information, or just to travel. Therefore, the need for a lingua franca is still the same, although the reasons why people need it are very different (Jenkins 2011).

Firstly, a definition of lingua franca is needed. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines the term as follows: “Language used as a means of communication between populations speaking vernaculars that are not mutually intelligible”. Therefore, a lingua franca is a language used for communication, commonly among people who do not have any language in common. In other words, when people with different native language communicate with each other, they can choose a different language as their lingua franca. In its original history, the term was firstly coined as an intermediary language used by speakers of Arabic with travelers from Western Europe (House 2003). So, even though it was developed as a vehicular language used within the domain of commerce, this has changed now, and English has become a global language of communication,

whose major characteristics are its functional flexibility and its spread across many different domains.

This need for some type of worldwide lingua franca is more pressing than it ever was in the past, and this is due to globalization. For this reason, now English is known as the global lingua franca. As Smokotin et al. (2014:509) states, “The ongoing processes of globalization have made an impact on the most different aspects of life of contemporary society”. Considering this, globalization affects every realm of society and obviously enough, language is one of them. Globalization has led to a situation where there is a need to be able to communicate on a broader scale, with a large variety of people, and for this reason, English has become a necessary language on a global scale.

2.2 ELF (English as Lingua Franca)

As a result of globalization, in the last decades there has been an exceptional spread of English that can be related with different historical, political, economic, cultural and technological factors (Sharma 2008). For this reason, new varieties of English have emerged, and they have started to question the traditional assumptions of native speaker-like, standard language, ownership of language, target language, etc. (Nero 2006).

Since the internationalisation of English as a lingua franca, a new variety of English, ELF (English as Lingua Franca) is starting to gain importance in the academic environment. Accordingly, as Seidlhofer (2005:339) claims, “when English is chosen as the means of communication among people from different backgrounds, across linguacultural boundaries, the preferred term is ‘ELF’”.

Apart from that, there are two key points that have crucial implications in academic settings that have made ELF gain more importance. These are, according to Mauranen and Ranta (2008), firstly, that ELF is not a deficient and failed attempt to become like a

native speaker, and secondly, that this does not mean native speakers are excluded in mainstream definitions of ELF, as they are potential users of Academic ELF when they have to interact with people with other L1s.

A basic definition of ELF is provided by Mauranen and Ranta (2008:185): “an additionally acquired language system which serves as a common means of communication for speakers of different first languages”. Importantly, according to this definition, while native speakers are not excluded from ELF, they are assumed to be using it – like non-native speakers – as “an additionally acquired language system”. That is, ELF is not the same as native English, and they will need to acquire it in order to communicate successfully in ELF settings, rather than assuming their traditional role as norm providers.

In fact, Jenkins (2011:929) claims that ELF represents a different situation, “The difference with ELF is a situation of accelerated language contact; it is leading to accelerated language change and, in many respects, it is simply speeding up regularization of processes that are already underway albeit more slowly in the native English”. This is totally connected with what Mauranen and Ranta (2008: 186) point out “International academic communities communicate in largely non-native groups. What counts is clarity, effectiveness and contextual appropriateness of communicate. While high academic standards are vital, native-like English is not”.

2.3 BELF (Business English as Lingua Franca)

The growing of ELF has given rise and validation to another shared language facility, BELF (Business English as a Lingua Franca). BELF, as a variety within the wide term ELF, has become so important that now it is beyond dispute that BELF has come to dominate as the language of international business over the past few decades (Charles 2007).

In this case, the main focus of BELF is the global business discourse community. Business organizations used to work across borders mainly with exporting and importing goods and services, but now, due to the increase of globalization, business professionals are in want to cooperate and compete internationally. Hence, the concept of BELF has emerged since this sets on examining the language and communication practices of internationally operating business professionals (Friedman 2006).

A basic definition of BELF is provided by Kankaanranta and Salminen (2013:17) “English used as a shared communication code when conducting business within the global business discourse community”. Therefore, the domain in BELF is much more specific than the one in ELF, since BELF is based on the specific field of business. Charles (2007:264) clarifies that “BELF differs from ELF in that the domain of BELF is solely business and its frame of reference is provided by the globalized business community”. Hence, it can be claimed that BELF, apart from focusing on the language itself, it has to take into account the particularly goal-oriented nature of business. Thus, it has to consider the main discourse strategies of effective business communication in international encounters, and according to Charles (2007:263), these are: “clarity, brevity, directness and politeness”. Consequently, “it is really important the genre knowledge of their own specific field of expertise, involving a shared understanding on what, why, how and when to communicate” (Kankaanranta and Salminen 2013:17). Moreover, Kankaanranta and Salminen (2010: 204) further state that:

(...) English in today’s global business environment is ‘simply work’ and its use is highly contextual. Thus, knowledge of the specific business context, the particular genres used in the particular business area, and overall business communication strategies are tightly intertwined with proficiency in English.

Communication in international business focuses on the achievement of business objectives such as reaching agreements or making deals, and BELF is used as the shared

language to achieve such objectives. In other words, business is the main purpose and domain of the use of BELF (Kankaanranta 2005). Apart from being a shared language, which means a language used by a variety of speakers from different backgrounds, Jenkins (2000) claims that BELF is a ‘neutral resource’. Here, the use of ‘neutral’ has to do with the fact that BELF is a shared variety used among business professionals from different mother languages, and none of the speakers can claim it as her/his mother tongue. Thus, since BELF is used by speakers with different mother tongues, variation and hybridity are two clear features of BELF interactions (Jenkins 2000). For this reason, native influence is present and it has been shown that, as Kankaanranta (2005) claims, BELF is a hybrid influenced by both, English and the speakers’ native language. Consequently, since ownership in BELF does not exist, fixed norms do not exist in order to determine the proper usage of BELF.

So, despite variation, there is a large agreement on the characteristics of successful BELF discourse. Kankaanranta and Salminen (2011:18) argue that

Successful BELF communication calls for (a) directness and clarity rather than grammatical accuracy, (b) the use of business-specific vocabulary and genres rather than just general English, and (c) expressions that are oriented toward building rapport and relationships rather than merely explaining the factual content of the message.

Thus, in BELF interactions the English language is not as important as the business context and the business knowledge. Further, BELF is simple and clear. This means that idiomatic expressions or complicated phraseology are not present, but instead, business-related vocabulary and technical jargon (Seidlhofer 2005). Thus, it can be claimed that communication knowhow is required in the professional competence of the speaker (Kankaanranta and Salminen 2011). This is undoubtedly related to what Seidlhofer (2005) claims, ‘getting the job done’, which is the main purpose of business.

According to this, BELF involves a different learning process, and Seidlhofer (2005:419) provides some of the important features that had to be considered when teaching BELF:

- In BELF teaching, learners should be trained to see themselves as communicators, with real jobs to perform and needs to fulfil.
- A focus on the job and needs, not the language they use to carry them out.
- Forms that differed to native English rarely hindered communication.

It can be claimed then, that the main objective of BELF has to do with the 'B', that is, with business, since the knowledge of how to manage and achieve business relations successfully is more important than the language itself.

In spite of this variation in BELF usage, it seems largely to agree on the characteristics of ELF.

2.4 ELF and the English native speaker model

The fact that the number of non-native speakers of English far outnumbers the number of English native speakers is a new reality (Jenkins 2011). Yet, it is only in the last few years that researchers have become aware of this new reality. In fact, it has been such an abrupt change, that as Mauranen (2010) claims, the old assumption that 'good English' equals that of the educated native speaker is starting to be questioned: "If the vast majority of readers and writers are not native speakers of English, perhaps qualities such as clarity and effectiveness in communications should be considered from their perspective rather than that of the native speaking minority" (Mauranen and Ranta: 2008: 184). Taking this statement into account, it is crucial to investigate its current manifestations in an international context, and the different resources people use in order to acquire this second language. As a matter of fact, "In ELF the norms are established by its users instead of native speakers" (Holliday 2008:122). For this reason,

since the users of ELF are mainly NNSs (on-Native Speakers) of English, the relevance and appropriateness of traditional native speakers models have been re-examined and reconsidered (Jenkins 2011).

ELF does not require an excellent command of the language, this involving grammar, vocabulary and fluency, but what counts is clarity, effectiveness and contextual appropriateness to communicate. Accordingly, what counts is to achieve communication without paying too much attention to the language itself. Notwithstanding, a basic knowledge of the language is required, and as Jenkins (2011:929) claims, “ELF is a simply speeding up regularization of processes that are already underway albeit more slowly in the native language”. Thus, ELF demands a different way of teaching English for second language learners. The problem with traditional methods of teaching English is that the native speaker and the standard language are seen as the model to follow in order to achieve successful learning. This is exactly what Jenkins (2006:143) says: “Many ELF speakers are misled by the prevailing – and often mixed – ideologies of nativeness and standard language”. Thus, by using this method, most NNSs tend to exposure a more positive attitude towards NS English models. Moreover, this is even more influenced by the ELT (English Language Teaching) industry trusting on textbooks, teacher education, syllabus, etc. that use NS English standard norms in order to evaluate successful learning (Jenkins 2006). In other words, NS English norms and standard are the main tools to assess success and failure in the English language learning process.

Yet, the NS and standard model is not what ELF wants to focus on. Since ELF is a “contact language between persons who share neither a common native language nor a common national culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication” (Firth 1996:240), and apart from that, its norms are set up by its users

instead of native speakers, this method is not useful at all. Hence, ELF calls for a way of teaching without too much attention to the proper use of the language and as Seidlhofer (2001:134) claims, “This has led to a broader conception of ELT in which notions of ‘correctness’, ‘norms’, ‘mistakes’ and ‘authority’ seem to have given way to an ethos characterized by the ‘transformative pedagogy’, ‘learner-centeredness’, ‘awareness’ and ‘self-reflection’”. However, a basic shared knowledge of English is needed and as Meierkord (2013:2) claims, “it is important to have a certain degree acquired the norms of standard English when learning the language”.

Mistakes and errors are also an important consideration within ELF. Since ELF does not follow any kind of native or standard model, mistakes and errors cannot be considered because they cannot be compared to anything. Within Standard English, there is always one possibility, namely a word, verb, collocation, etc. seen as correct, while in ELF, all possibilities can be used and in fact, they are not seen as errors but as variants or differences (Jenkins 2006).

Apart from that, a change of mentality is also required, and this is what Seidlhofer et al. (2008:32) claim, “What has to be accepted by speakers both in- and outside the ELF community – is that ELF cannot be regarded as bad or deficient English – it is just different in form from native speaker English and serves different functions”. Llurda (2004) also claims that non-native speakers have to see themselves as speakers of English in their own right and not as deficient users of English, because if not, it will not be possible to take control over English and “feel entitled to the authoritative use of a variety of the language that belongs to them” (Llurda 2004:320).

ELF focuses on communication, and for this reason, language learning has to be effective in terms of communicative efficiency. For this reason, “ELF promotes the raising of awareness of intercultural phenomena in communication and the importance

of strategies like linguistic accommodation and negotiation of meaning thereby, again, giving more prominence to how mutual understanding is achieved than to an enforced convergence on standards” (Seidlhofer et al. 2008:32).

Consequently, what ELF looks at is intelligibility and communicative efficiency instead of native speaker prestige (Fiedler 2011).

2.5 ELF as a language for communication

The dichotomy between ‘language of communication’ and ‘language of identification’ has been commonly applied to the context of English as a lingua franca of communication. Both terms were coined by the German applied linguist Werner Hüllen, but their meanings are quite different. Knapp (2008:133) describes this dichotomy as:

A ‘language of communication’ is used for practical communicative purposes, and due to its primary functional nature, correctness or particular stylistic and cultural features associated with the speech community from which this language originates are less important. On the other hand, ‘language of identification’ means a language which is learnt in order to be integrated into and identify with the respective speech community.

ELF is a language whose main aim is to achieve efficiently communication among speakers who do not have any language in common, and they rely on English in order to communicate. Considering this, Hüllen (1992:314) points out that “English in its role as an international language is used as a language for communication and not as a language for identification”.

The fact that makes ELF not to be a ‘language for identification’ is that ELF speakers know that they use a variety of English that belongs to them, that is, they are aware that English is not their own language, but unconsciously, this is subject to the different features and tools that each individual has at his/her disposal. Apart from that, each ELF speaker has its own ‘language of identification’, that is, its individual L1, and

consequently its culture, and obviously, this is the language to which they feel identified (House 2003).

This dichotomy is even more highlighted by Pözl (2003:5), who compares the difference between the fact of being a language for communication or a language for identification to two different linguistic functions:

Such a categorization is based upon the two-fold function of linguistic signs, namely the referential function and the expressive one. Consequently, a language selected for communication only expresses a communicative and primarily referential function, i.e. the cultural associated with this natural language is not activated by its users.

So, according to Pözl, ELF does not involve any type of culture acquisition. In other words, ELF speakers do not have to identify with the English culture, and this is totally related to the terms he uses to define ELF, “native-culture-free code”.

Participants in ELF communication are a clear reflection of their individual cultures, and this involves that ‘they have their individual cultural backgrounds regarding communicative norms and standards’ (Meiekord 2013). For this reason, interferences from the different mother tongues are common in ELF interactions. So, in ELF communication more than one culture is involved.

It is possible to see then, that ELF does not have any kind of specific culture and this can lead to some challenging situations, “Unless the speakers are familiar with the others’ mother tongues, the amount of different cultures interacting in these situations demand that speakers cope with the unexpected, by having to apply imperfect knowledge of and competence in the language they use” (Meiekord 2013:3). Therefore, the result is what Koole and tenThije (1994:69) call “culture constructed in cultural contact’ or ‘lingua franca culture’ in order to avoid this feeling on insecurity that participants experience”. The aim of this ‘lingua franca culture’ is “to establish a unique

set of rules for interactions that are reflected in specific linguistic characteristics” (Meiekord 2013:3). This involves the following two principles: the first one is that participants want to avoid embarrassing situations, they want to save their face and not use expressions that can lead to misunderstandings. The second has to do with the supportive attitude that ELF participants have to take among others, they want to assure a benevolent attitude and for this reason, they use supportive-back channels (Meiekord 2013).

So, participants are aware of the assumption that in ELF interactions different cultural backgrounds, norms and behaviours are present and as a means to end up with problematic situations, they need to adapt a supportive and helpful attitude.

However, Hüllen dichotomy does not find unanimous support. Jenkins (2007) pays special attention to ELF users and the complex nature of their identity claiming that ELF speakers use their own identity to the language they produced, and this allows them, somehow, to feel identified with it. In relation to this, Block (2007) states that identity instead of being a natural and possessed fact is performed, and each speaker has various identities and these are expressed through language and they cannot be detached from the other. So, the point here is that each speaker has a set of different identities and depending on the language it is used, a specific identity is carried on, but no having any identity is totally impossible. For this reason, he claims that not only English native culture identity is required but identity is also based on speakers’ own sociocultural background and incipient awareness of membership in a specific speech community.

Fielder’s view can also be connected with what Cook (1993) calls ‘multicompetence’, which is totally different from the native monolingual’s competence. According to him, each individual possesses more than one set of linguistic and socio-cultural knowledge, and this is related to the different linguistics knowledge.

Therefore, discussion is still open to question whether ELF is really used without expressing identity or not.

2.6 L1 influence

When something new is confronted, consciously or unconsciously, it is brought up what is known to what it is not, making it impossible to learn anything entirely from scratch. This is certainly no less true when it is set about learning a foreign language without relying to some extent on the mother tongue and the impulse to look for similarities and draw conclusions based on them. However, what typically happens is that there is influence from each person's L1, such that the Englishes spoken by each are not the same, but remain intelligible during conversations (McArthur 2004). This involves differences in pronunciations of words, vocabulary, intonation, and grammar, all of which distinguish the type of English from another ELF or from a NS form of English. There are, of course, many other influences at play when we learn a foreign language, but the influence that the mother tongue has on the language we produce is the most important one. Brown (2002) suggests that the language produced by foreign learners is so unavoidably influenced, and even distorted, by the mother tongue of the learner.

Particular attention has been paid to the influence that the speaker's L1 play into ELF conversation. As Seidlhofer (2001) states, ELF connects speakers with different first languages, and consequently, each speaker adapts the structure of his/her native language and culture to his/her own needs. For this reason, as Smokotin et al. (2014:511) claim, "ELF speakers need not follow strictly linguistic and cultural norms of the English language native speakers since ELF communication frequently occurs without their participation".

Therefore, ELF is found in a multilingual context since its characteristics are influenced by different languages. In fact, this is what makes ELF efficient. Among these

characteristics, there are aspects such as the exploiting of parallel structures in different L1s, code-switching, intercomprehension, etc. (Smokotin et al. 2014). Consequently, Cook (2002:11) claims that “L1 influence is no longer regarded negatively as error or deficiency but positively as differences which emerge as motivated by communicative requirement”. Moreover, he states that ELF involves a perspective of multicompetence where different languages are part of a continuum rather than being separate entities in the mind of multilingual speakers and this involves that speakers of whatever L1 can use ELF properly for their own purposes without relying on the native-speaker norms. So, the point is that in order to help ELF speakers to feel more proper to the English language, it allows the introduction of the different L1s in order to reach the speakers’ communicative goals. Thus, ELF speakers can use it in a totally different manner depending on the speakers’ L1.

2.7 ELF and the notion of intelligibility

ELF emphasizes the role of English in communication between speakers of different L1s, i.e. the primary reason for learning English today; it suggest the idea of community as opposed to alienness; it emphasizes that people have something in common rather than their differences, it implies that ‘mixing’ languages is acceptable [...] and thus that there is nothing inherently in retaining certain characteristics of the L1, such as accent (Jenkins 2000:11)

Considering this, it can be imagined that comprehensible problems are present in ELF situations since there are several factors that influence it. Moreover, this is even more highlighted by what Berns (2008:329) says: “communication is between two (or more) individuals who bring their own experiences with English, their own cultural norms – all of which impact the outcome of the interaction”.

If this is taken into consideration, it can be said that intelligibility within ELF interactions is not possible.

The first aspect that has to be considered is the ambiguity of the concept of ‘intelligibility’. There is not a totally proper definition of this word and, consequently, an ‘intelligible language’ does not exist, “There is no universally accepted definition of intelligibility, nor nay field-wide consensus on the best way to measure it. Further, there is little empirical evidence to suggest which features are crucial for intelligibility” (Isaacs 2008:555).

However, most researchers agree on the fact that ‘intelligibility’ is totally related with the understanding of an utterance. It is true that ‘intelligibility’ is the concept most used within ELF research, but there are also other different kinds of understanding. Smith (1992) makes a clear distinction between ‘intelligibility’ (being able to identify and recognize the words of an utterance), ‘comprehensibility’ (knowing the meaning of words of an utterance) and ‘interpretability’ (being aware of the meaning behind words and utterances).

Yet, when these three concepts are applied to real data, the result is problematic. This has to do with two main reasons that, in fact, are interconnected. The first one resides in the very definition of ELF, “an additionally acquired language system which serves as a common means of communication for speakers of different first languages” Mauranen and Ranta (2008:185). So, within ELF interactions, different languages appear and since ELF participants are subject to different languages, and in most cases, they do not know them, the concepts of ‘intelligibility’, ‘comprehensibility’ and ‘interpretability’ are useless. The other reason, that is closely connected with the previous one, is that there is not a standard variety of ELF, and for this reason, the concepts cannot be applied. This has to do with what Jenkins (2000) suggests, that for mutual intelligibility in ELF conversations, there must be an adhesion to certain linguistic features.

Thus, some linguists such as Jenkins and Seidlhofer attempt to establish a standard variety of ELF, as Seidlhofer (2004:213) claims: “make it a linguistic phenomenon in its own right”. However, this is challenging due to the natural diversity of ELF, and this is what Canagarajah (2007:925) defends: “It is impossible to standardize ELF due to its inherent diversity. It is intersubjectively constructed in each specific context of interaction”. In other words, ELF cannot be standardized since it always depends on the context and the people involved in the interaction.

Notwithstanding, Canagarajah (2007:925) states that “ELF is negotiated by each set of speakers for their purposes”. So, this involves the ‘monitoring idea’, that means that ELF participants establish all the aspects that are appropriate for guaranteeing intelligibility, this involving grammar, phonology and lexicon (Canagarajah 2007).

So, in ELF, the same participants are the ones who work in order to avoid challenging situations and assure intelligibility, comprehensibility and interpretability, as House (2014:365) claims: “Lingua franca speakers must always work out a new joint linguistic, intercultural and behavioural basis for their communication in different communities of practice”.

Thus, Firth (1996) notes that ELF participants put an effort to make their conversations work, so “they are constantly engaged in doing ‘interactional work’, as well as, ‘interpretative efforts’ in order to maintain this ‘normality’ and ‘ordinariness’ despite the different non-standard linguistic and pragmatic behaviour” (Firth 1996:257). In relation to this, he poses two main strategies: the ‘let-it-pass’ and ‘make-it-normal’ strategies (Firth 1996). The first one has to do with speakers not paying whole attention to every word or phrase in order to avoid a problematic situation. The second strategy refers to accommodate a non-standard structure. According to him, this will help them to reach effective communication.

However, ELF participants are humans and this is not a hundred per cent guarantee, so, some challenging and difficult problems can appear within ELF interactions.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

Built on the notion of BELF, this study seeks to analyse the reality of this term through the experience of different Catalan employees working in international companies and using English as the language of international communication. That is, companies that are not from an English native speaking country but use English in order to conduct business.

The different participants for this project come from different Catalan companies that operate internationally in fields such as textile, transport, logistics, commerce and technology. All the companies have headquarters in Catalonia. For this reason, the native languages of all the respondents were Catalan and Spanish. Yet, they had English as their official international language.

A total number of 27 participants, 19 male and 8 female, whose age was between 25 and 60, while half of the participants were between 35 and 50. All respondents used English in their daily work at the time of the study.

Since the aim of the study is to focus on non-native speakers of English, respondents were all either Catalan or Spanish native speakers and used English as a second or foreign language.

3.2 Questionnaire

The different data for this project was collected from an on-line survey questionnaire targeted at employees from different Catalan international business companies that used English as a second language in their daily work. Thus, the survey was devoted to employees in seven globally operating Catalan-based companies, among them, sales department headquarter, cargo transportists, secretaries, international relationship workers, etc.

The present survey was developed by using Anna's Mauranen online survey about the English used in international companies as a model (Survey Business English as Lingua Franca < <http://ianketa.ru/anketa/221457065/> >).

The survey was divided into two different parts; the first part focused on the personal information of the respondent, that is, the age, the gender, the education level, etc., and in the second part, on the one hand, it looked at the participant's personal experience in English, and on the other hand, at the relationship between their company and English. In total, 20 questions, all of them presented in English.

For most of the survey items, there were four different options and the participant had just to click one of the spots in the four quadrant graph. Other questions were leveled from a degree scale along two dimensions. For example, the statement, 'For my communication to succeed, it is important that I have a wide vocabulary in English' was rated according to importance, ranging from 'weak' to 'good'. Nonetheless, a few questions with an open and, somehow, long answer were also present.

The objective of the questionnaire was to set out the perceptions of the participants about their use of English as a means of communication in their jobs. For this reason, the main source of investigation were: the use of English at work (why, when, with whom, how, etc.), the nature of English (characteristics of pronunciation and vocabulary), characteristics of effective communication in BELF, and also the relationship between the company and English, how the company uses English as its international language to conduct business with other companies.

3.3 Procedure

3.3.1 Data Collection

In order to collect the present data, the first thing to do was to look for companies, all of them settled in Catalonia, that work internationally. Once the list with an important

number of companies was completed, the second step was to contact them via email. Firstly, what needed to be known was if they use English, and in fact, if they use English in their daily work in order to conduct business.

After having their permission to work with them, the number of people within the company used English in their daily work was asked. Most of the workers came from sales, international relationship and logistic departments. Finally, the last step was to send them the online link of the survey (<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1ngfHBOfgaTDcQdPi1CwY1-xNXp3Xl0r-ly831fZJO6Y/viewform>). The questionnaire was created with the “Google docs” application that allows the creator to receive all the answers in his/her personal email. Yet, it has to be admitted that not all the surveys sent were answered, but after all, 27 questionnaires were replied.

Multinational companies are intended to work and conduct business with companies from other parts of the world and to do so, they need to find, apart from a shared business environment, a shared language. The main focus of this study was to analyse English as this shared language among workers from the same background, that is, Catalan employees. For this reason, it was required to find workers from different Catalan international companies who use English in their daily work in order to explore the nature of that communication.

3.3.2 Data Analysis

Lingua franca communication does not have its own specific norms and this makes it difficult to apply any existing instrument. However, since the data come from a questionnaire devoted to different perspectives, quantitative and qualitative methodologies have been used. From the scale range questions, the results were analysed quantitatively, while from the open questions, they have been analysed

qualitative. Thus, quantitative analysis seeks to measure the actual use of BELF, and the qualitative looks at analysing how BELF is used.

These different methodologies allow to look at the data from multiple perspectives, and this also shows the multiple faces of the companies' communication process.

Through the survey it is possible to gather detailed information by analyzing how participants behave when they have to express themselves in English with other speakers of English. It is important to take into account that not only was their use of English observed but also how they felt throughout the communicative process of that language in general, as they were asked about it.

4. Results

This section presents the results obtained from the survey. The present paper is divided into two research parts: the first one deals with the participants' use of English as workers of an international business company, and the second, investigates on the use and the relationship between English and the company.

4.1

The first part that guided the present study enquired about the use of English as a shared language among non-native speakers from the same Catalan background.

The first question concerns whether the participants use English mostly for written or oral communication in their daily business life.

When using English for business purposes, you use it mostly for...



Looking at the percentages above stated, 48% of the participants use English for business purposes mostly for written communication. However, 33% of the participants use it orally. So, there is not a very clear difference between these two.

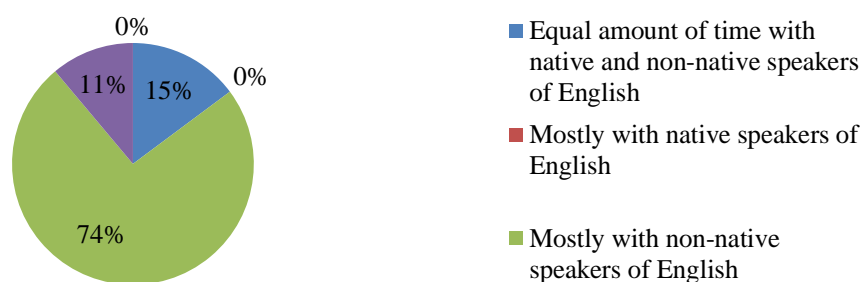
Then, a 19% answered the first option, 'equally for oral and written communication', while the last two options, 'only for oral communication' and 'only for written communication' were not chosen.

From this question, it can be claimed that most non-native speakers from the Catalan business background use the language mainly for written communication, but this is not the only use, since the oral use is also considerable, and the most focused options of

‘only for written communication’ and ‘only for oral communication’ have not received any answer. Therefore, they use it for both, oral and written, even though the written form prevails.

The second question deals with the target audience to whom participants communicate.

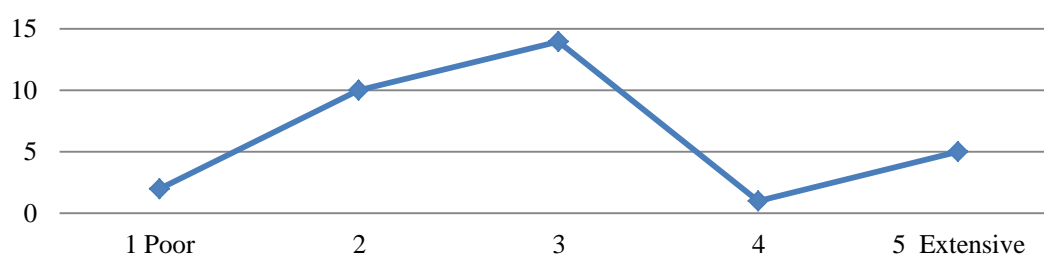
When using English for business purposes you communicate...



From this second graph, it can be clearly deduced that participants use English mostly with non-native speakers of English, 74% have chosen the option ‘mostly with non-native speakers of English’. That is, their target audience is non-native. However, native speakers are not totally excluded since the option ‘only with non-native speakers of English’ has only been selected by 11% of the participants. Further, 15% have selected ‘equal amount of time with native and non-native speakers of English’. It is clear then, considering this present data, that workers from Catalan international companies tend to use English as their language of international communication with other non-native speakers. Yet, there are some cases where native speakers are included, maybe because of connections with English native-speaking companies.

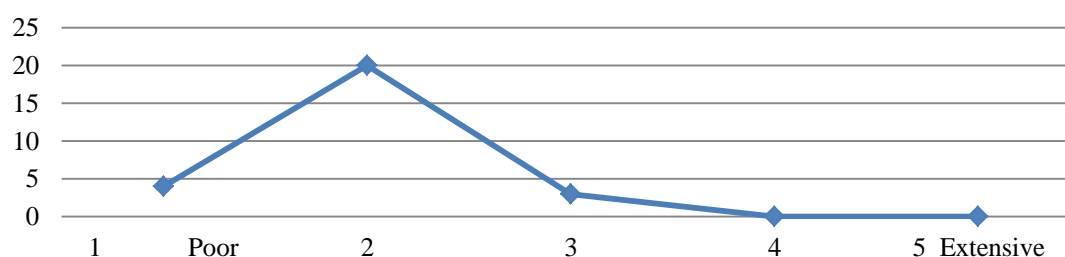
The following two questions have to do with the respondents’ own level of pronunciation and vocabulary. These two competences have been selected since they are the ones that cause most trouble to non-native speakers of English. In this case, participants were asked to assess their current level of the language.

Please, assess your current vocabulary of English



From the graph above, it can be stated that participants realize that their level of vocabulary of English is quite low except for one participant who seems to have a good command of vocabulary in English. Notwithstanding this, here it is important to take into account that in English the range of vocabulary is wide and this has influenced the learning process of second language learners who are afraid of not having all the vocabulary they are supposed to know.

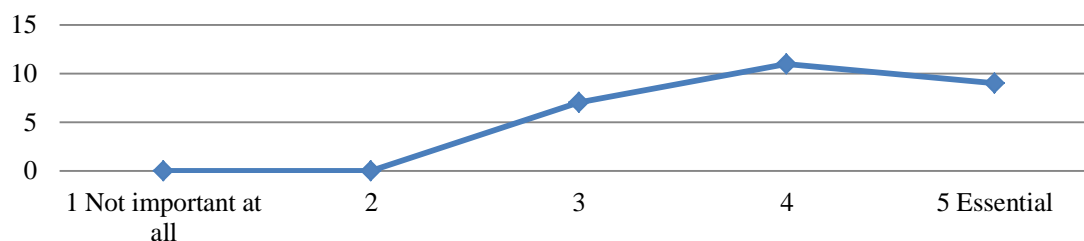
Please, assess your pronunciation and accent in English



In this one, it can be clearly seen that pronunciation is one of the skills that concerns non-native speakers the most. One reason can be because when speaking, a lot of aspects intervene at the same time, ranging from L1-influence to feelings of fear and shyness. Accordingly, the results extracted from this question show that the majority of the participants assess their pronunciation as having a quite poor level, and even 4 of them have chosen the 'poor' option.

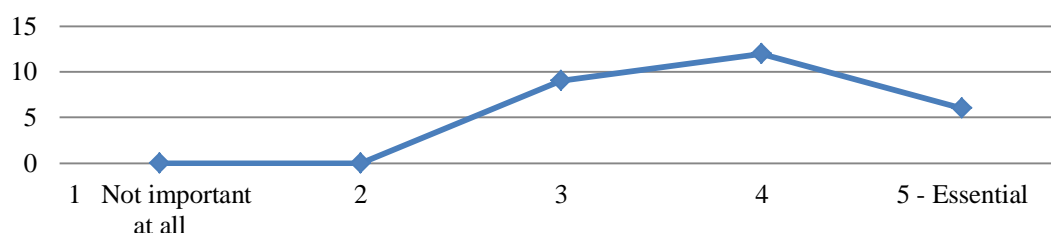
The following two questions are related with the two previous ones but in this case the participants were asked about the importance of vocabulary and pronunciation in order to achieve successful communication.

For communication to succeed, how important do you think is to have an extensive vocabulary of English?



Here, it is possible to see that there is the common feeling that in order to achieve successful communication, it is important to have a considerable range of vocabulary. In fact, the majority of the participants have ranged its importance in terms of essentiality. In other words, they believe that it is important to have an extensive vocabulary of English in order to achieve successful communication.

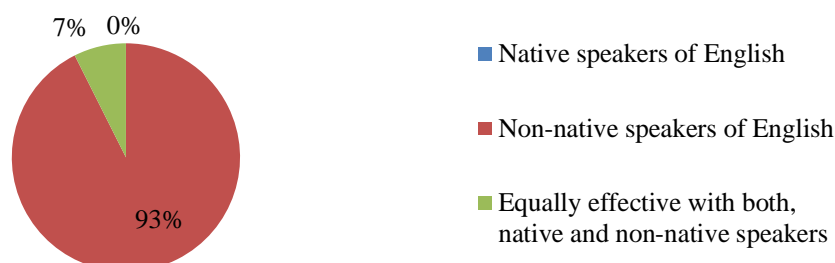
For communication to succeed, how important do you think is to have a good pronunciation and native-like accent?



Again, there is the same situation as the previous question. In this case, participants are asked to range how important is to have a good pronunciation and a native-like accent in order to achieve successful communication. Here, the majority of the participants agree on that having a good pronunciation and sound like a native speaker is quite important. In fact, all the respondents consider it an essential aspect rather than a not important one. This, together with the previous question about vocabulary, are one of the consequences of using the native speaker model because non-native speakers want to be like the native ones and since this is quite impossible, they feel insecure of not being understood if they do not speak properly.

The next question has implications for the target audience. In this case, participants were asked with whom they communicate more effectively, with native speakers of English, non-native speakers of English or with both, native and non-native speakers.

You find that you communicate more effectively with...



According to these results, there is a great majority towards the option, 'non-native speakers of English', except two of the respondents who have selected the last option, 'equally effective with both, native and non-native speakers'. Here, somehow, the results were expected because since all the participants are non-native speakers of English, it is obvious that they prefer to communicate with other non-native speakers of English in order to avoid difficult situations and being judged by native speakers.

The last question from this first part is focused on the notion of culture. This question tries to identify if non-native speakers of English associate the language to any culture. The different options concern British, American or any culture, and also the option of others was included.

Do you associate English as a language with any national culture?



The results show that most participants relate English with the British culture, while only a 15% consider it with the US and an 11% with any culture. The reason behind this is that most materials devoted to second language learners of English use British English and accordingly, they deal with British culture.

4.2

The second part enquired the use and the relationship between English and the company.

International companies are intended to work and conduct business with companies from other parts of the world and to do so, they need to find, apart from a shared business environment, a shared language. For this reason, what this part looks at is at English as this shared language.

The first question concerns the essentiality of English within the participants' companies.

What do you think about the use of English in your company, is it essential?



For the majority of the companies that have participated in this project, English is essential in order to work and conduct business. Yet, there are 19% of the participants who say that English is not so important, maybe because their work internationally is not so important.

The following question looks at whether English is used as the company international language or not.

Is English the international language in your company?



Here, all the participants have agreed on the same answer. For all the participants, English is the international language of their company. For this reason, it can be claimed that for all the companies considered for this project, English is the international common language they use in order to achieve agreements and carry on business.

The next question considers two aspects; so, there are two questions that are, somehow, interconnected. On the one hand, whether companies do some English courses or classes and, on the other hand, if they ask workers to have any kind of English level.

What is the relationship between your company and English, do you do some English courses, classes or do they ask workers any kind of level?

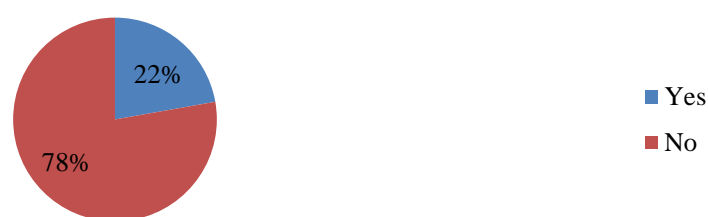
Here, the answers have been relatively similar. Most of the participants claimed to do some English courses and classes. Yet, the frequency of these classes/courses is different. In fact, one of them claims: 'We tend to do some English courses every 4 or 5 months but when within two months they make us to assist to some classes, we know that this is because a new project is coming soon'. The average period of time between the English courses is 6 months but some have agreed that it depends on the actual work of the company.

Apart from that, results show that workers are asked to have a minimum level of English for the last 15 years. This can be seen because all the workers who have been

working there for more than 15 years were not asked any kind of level, while the newest ones were. In terms of the level, B1 is the required minimum level. However, all these old workers have been forced to reach a B1 level outside the company. The companies do that in order to prove that workers have a minimum level that allows them to carry on a conversation, either written or oral.

The next two questions are related to the native speaker model. Participants are asked if their goal when speaking English is to sound as a native speaker or if they would like to sound as a native speaker.

Is your goal as an English user to speak as similar as possible to native speakers?



When you speak English, would you like to sound like a native speaker?



From these two questions, it can be asserted that almost all the participants do not speak as similar as native speakers but in fact, if they are asked whether they would like to sound as native speakers, almost all of them agree on the affirmative answer. Even this is quite controversial, it shows that they are far from it but their aim is to speak as native speakers.

It is a common fact that some companies have someone correcting the written texts the company produced. For this reason, what the next question looks at is if this is common within the Catalan international companies that have participated in this project. In this case, the question has two possible answers, yes and not, and in the affirmative case, respondents were further asked 'who' that person is.

Do you have somebody correcting your written texts in English?



This question has gone beyond expectations since 70% of the respondents confirm to have someone correcting their written texts. From this, it can be known intuitively that, on the one hand, they do not feel sure about their English and they want someone looking and correcting everything they produce and, on the other hand, that they have fear of committing any mistake. Only a 30% have chosen the option 'no'.

Further, when looking at the person who is behind these corrections, native speakers, language specialists, teachers and even translators are common.

The other question deals with the notion of intelligibility that is commonly attached to ELF or BELF. Consequently, participants were asked to explain if they have faced any intelligibility problem when using English.

Have you experienced any serious intelligibility problem?

In this question, the answers have been quite disputed since percentages are more or less the same. It is possible to see that half of the participants admit to have experienced intelligibility situations while the other half do not. It is common to non-native speakers to face lack intelligibility in speaking English since mistakes are always present. However, if one has good resources to solve any kind of problem, these situations can be more plausible.

The last question has to do with errors. It is true that non-native speakers of English are often worried, and even, in most cases, they have fear of committing mistakes. However, this is not what ELF/BELF claims. According to ELF or BELF, mistakes are just a result of the communicative process. Thus, this question aimed at knowing the opinion of non-native speakers of English who use the language as a means of communication.

When you se errors in other people in English, do they bother you or do you think they are fine?

Here, the point is that participants want to sound and be like a native speaker but they are not concerned about errors since 89% agree on the option that considers the errors to be fine. This seems to be subjected to controversy but in fact, on the one hand, the point of wanting to sound like a native speaker is the result of using the native speaker model that has been used for years to students of English as a second language, and, on the other hand, the fact of considering mistakes to be fine has to do with the notion of companionship among non-native speakers of English, and, moreover, the idea that they have become users in the sense that they have appropriated the language for their own purposes.

5. Discussion

The present study was designed to determine the significance of the appliance of BELF on different Catalan companies while considering their actual use and their feelings towards the language.

Findings seem to suggest that globalization has implied changes mostly related to increasing competition and the rapid changes of technology and information transfer. Thus, companies need to keep in mind various aspects to challenge these changes, and language is one of them. More and more companies feel the need to interact with other companies, so, somehow, their business' prosperity relies on the relationship with other companies. For this reason, there is the need of having or sharing a common language.

The point here is that English has become this common international language, largely used by non-native speakers as a means of communication, and in order to achieve successful communication, it is not necessary to rely on the English native speaking model.

For this reason, the present paper tries to provide a description of how Catalan speaking companies deal with English in international business communication.

Since the establishment of English as the world lingua franca, BELF (Business English as Lingua Franca) is starting to gain importance in the international business environment. Taking into account the definition provided by Kankaanranta and Salminen (2013:17), "English used as a shared communicative code when conducting business within the global business discourse community", it can be stated that the Catalan companies used for this project are using BELF since they use English as the language to achieve effective communication with other non-native speakers of English in almost all their international business relationships. However, as results have shown, not all the aspects and features concerning BELF can be applied to the Catalan business

environment. From now on, the concept of BELF will be used instead of ELF since the frame of reference for this paper is the globalized business community.

On the one hand, it can be stated that the participants are using BELF since they use English as the international common language to conduct business mainly with other non-native speakers. Yet, native speakers are not excluded and in fact, in mainstream definitions of BELF native speakers are also present. The reason why they prefer non-native speakers has to do with the feeling of empathy they have towards the other. So, it appears to be that they feel support and empathy towards the other speakers. Furthermore, “non-native learners have greater empathy because they know from their own experience what difficulties learners may encounter in acquiring another language” (Kaczmarzyk, 2013: 2). Apart from that, participants admit that they use English to conduct business so, they adapt the language to their own purpose and it can be claimed, that their usage is quite effective. Considering all these, it should be stated that the English they use is BELF.

However, on the other hand, it is possible to see that not all the actual features of BELF can be applied to the Catalan business companies used for this project, and one of the reasons is the way the language has been presented to these second-language users. Traditional methods of teaching the language have imposed fear among non-native speakers and, obviously enough, this has affected their use of the language. Yet, the main reason behind this is that they see the language as something outside them, something it is imposed in a certain way they cannot change.

The first point is based on the fact that participants prefer using written to oral English. It can be speculated that one of the reasons why they prefer to communicate in writing is because in oral speech there are too many aspects that take place at the same time, among them, nerves, improvisation, fear and pronunciation problems, and this can make

speakers feel more insecure. In the majority of cases, among second language learners of English, there is an extended common feeling of anxiety when they have to interact orally. Anxiety is present in many learning contexts with negative connotations. Horwitz (1991) indicates that it clearly acts as a hindrance to effective communication and in fact, this is why they have fear to speak in public. As the author puts it:

Language anxiety is a state of apprehension occurring in the process of a second/foreign language use owing to the user's incompetence in communication with the language. It is a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language process (Horwitz, 1991:38).

Thus, it can be understood that when communicating orally, factors such as competition, real difficulties in language processing and production, personal and interpersonal emotions and beliefs can challenge the self-concept of the learner. In response to this, non-native speakers of English prefer written to oral communication, because it allows them more time to think, look and correct. Additionally, results have shown that there are more and more Catalan companies that have someone taking care of everything the company produces in English. That is, someone whose job is to correct and look at everything the company writes in English. With that, they avoid uncomfortable situations and misunderstandings.

However, this does not help them. The fact is that, when it comes to language correction, finding the line between agitating and helping is difficult. It is important to care about language and communication, and what speakers want is to make sure they are clearly understood. Yet, corrections too often overstep the boundaries of appropriate usage. Thus, as Edge (1989) states, accuracy does not play such an important role, as it would be more important to get the meaning through than being accurate. According to this, he claims that "they need to feel that people are listening to what they are saying,

not to how they are saying it. [...] If learners can feel their own emotions being expressed in a language, this will build up a relationship with the language which will help them learn it” (Edge, 1989:37).

Thus, since communication is all that matters from international business relationships, the fact of having someone correcting everything does not allow the user of the language to gain self-confidence. For this reason, it would be better for them to feel secure enough to produce their own texts without any kind of supervision.

Considering this, it can be imagined that comprehensible problems are present in conversations between non-native speakers of English. When using a language, either written or oral, too many aspects take place, such as L1’s influence, culture or even identity, and all these aspects influence the language they produce, and since differences are present, this can lead to some misunderstandings. Most participants have faced some problems when using the language and, all of them have to do with trying to use English always correctly and without committing any mistake. However, they have to be aware that they are using English as the language of international communication, participants have to be aware that they are interacting mainly with other non-native speakers, that is, different languages appear, and what is more, in most cases, they do not know them, so, for this reason, they have to be aware that their problems can also be the other users’ problems. So, for this reason, they need to adapt the language to their own purposes without taking care of following strictly the norms of Standard English.

Yet, this is still innovative but second language learners need to become aware that intelligibility is not a problem. Moreover, there are some methods to sort out these difficult situations. In fact, there are some factors adding intelligibility, such visual clues to help in the recognition of the speaker’s message, the linguistic and the situational

context, and what is most important in the case of this study, the business knowledge, that is, familiarity with the individual business environment.

Considering this, it has to be claimed that speakers are using a language that is not their L1 and for this reason, problems can appear. Notwithstanding, these problems are not going to be a hindrance to effective communication and users do not have to be afraid of them since they are just a result of the communicative process.

Another point that has an important role on the participants used for this project is the attachment of the English language to the English culture. The first thing that has to be dealt with is that each language has its own culture, and these are totally connected. However, the problem is that each speaker has its own native language and this is totally connected with its culture. In other words, speakers have their own culture and language, and when learning a language they try to adapt to the corresponding culture, but this is not possible at all since everything they get new is going to be either influenced or compared with what they have. For this reason, second language learners need to know and learn things about the English culture, but they do not need to acquire and follow it in order to be successful speakers of the language. However, this is what books and teaching methods have looked at for many years and obviously, it has affected the use of the language of these participants.

For this reason, it seems obvious that participants are using English as a ‘language of communication’, but still, they are not totally conscious about it. So, within the business environment, speakers need to realize that English in its role as an international language is used as a language for communication and not as a language for identification.

Another consequence that has been extracted is the concern that most non-native speakers have about vocabulary and pronunciation.

On what vocabulary concerns, there have been some agreements that rely on that vocabulary plays an important role in language learning. In fact, this is what traditional teaching methods of English consider, and consequently, they claim that “vocabulary is one of the most important things to be taught in learning foreign languages because it will be impossible to speak up without variety of words” (Ur, 1996:60). Obviously enough, this importance on vocabulary has influenced second language speakers and has caused fear and anxiety of not achieving successful communication without having a wide range of vocabulary.

The same can be applied to pronunciation. Since traditional methods have relied on the native speaker model, what second language learners want is to imitate this model. However, this is quite impossible since each speaker has its own L1, and this has a totally influence on the language they produce. That is, when something new is confronted, consciously or unconsciously, it is brought up what is known to what it is not, making it impossible to learn anything entirely from scratch. So, it is impossible to learn a foreign language without relying to some extent on the mother tongue and the impulse to look for similarities and draw conclusions based on them.

The problem is that participants are too worried about vocabulary and pronunciation, and even they admit their difficulty, they want to achieve a totally wide range of vocabulary and a native-like pronunciation. For this reason, what has to be implied is that they use English as a means of communication and following the native speaker model is not effective at all. And, in fact, this is what BELF claims for. BELF does not require an excellent command of the language, this involving grammar, vocabulary and fluency, but what counts is to achieve communication without paying too much attention to the language itself. Thus, ELF demands a different way of teaching for second language learners different from the one based on ideologies of nativeness and

standard language (Jenkins 2006). Yet, a basic shared knowledge of English is needed. For this reason, results have shown that international companies ask their workers to have a minimum level of English as a way to assure that they are prepared. Furthermore, courses and classes are delivered to these workers in order to keep practicing and learning more about the language. In fact, this is an effective method, but sometimes there is the problem that these courses are too focused on the language instead of looking at what the workers need in order to achieve effective communication. That is, they put more pressure on the workers instead of helping them by teaching how they can get their job done with easier and more helpful methods.

So, since most interactions within the business environment take place among non-native speakers, they have to be aware that English is the language they use to communicate effectively and be aware that “What counts is clarity, effectiveness and contextual appropriateness of communication. While high academic standards are vital, native-like English is not” (Mauranen and Ranta 2008:186).

Results have shown that English is used as the international language for communication in the Catalan international company environment, but the English they use is not exactly the variety of English that BELF claims for. Traditional methods of teaching have played an importance influence on workers and this has totally affected their relationship with the language. It is true that the notions of ELF and BELF are quite innovative and are still now beyond dispute, but what is clear is that a change of mentality is required in order to adapt the workers themselves within the international business environment. This will need an important effort but obviously, things will get easier. The problem is that now their communication seems to be quite effective, but obviously, adapting the English language for their own business purposes will help them.

6. Conclusion

The present study examined the significance of the appliance of the notion of BELF (Business English Lingua Franca) on different Catalan companies while considering their actual use and feelings towards the language.

It is in the last few years that researchers have become aware of the reality that nowadays English has become a lingua franca and, that it is spoken by more non-native than native speakers. As a result, other varieties of English such as ELF or BELF appeared.

This study has offered tentative support for the implication of BELF within the business environment, since it shows that using English just as a common language for communication will help them to get their job done more effectively and easily.

However, as it can be seen through this paper, companies and, consequently, Catalan society, are still not adapted to this innovative variety of English and both, workers and the company, still rely on the notions of traditional methods of using the language, whose main aim is to follow the native speaker model.

The use of BELF involves a way of looking at language and communication that is different from traditional ways based on Standard English, either British or American. In BELF interactions, the formal mastery of Standard English is not as important as the business context and the business knowledge.

As with any research, there are some limitations to this study that may have impacted the results and should be considered and corrected in further work. The sample size in this plot study was considerably small, which could have affected the internal validity of the study.

Studies in these areas would provide valuable information in the ongoing investigations into the relationship between English and the business environment in the language

acquisition process, and could help to further understand the interplay between different languages coexisting in the same context.

The preliminary data presented here, although tentative, begin to offer an explanation for these features that affect non-native speakers of English when using and learning the language as the common international language to conduct business and provide encouraging enough findings to continue doing research on this topic.

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