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Pragmatic strategies used amongst Erasmus students in ELF interactions: a qualitative study.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the communicative strategies used by speakers of English as a *lingua franca* (ELF) during Erasmus exchange programmes in relation to the purpose of each strategy. It starts with a description of ELF based on previous theories on the topic, including the research on pragmatic strategies. The corpus used for the analysis consists of a set of ten recorded ELF interaction among Erasmus students. The strategies used by the participants in these interactions have been classified into three categories depending on their communicative function: strategies used for preventing misunderstandings, strategies used for repairing a problem in communication, and strategies used to construct solidarity relations and identity. The analysis of he data shows that ELF users communicate in a cooperative way and rely on the use of pragmatic strategies, combining them in order to successfully achieve their communicative purposes.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo de fin de grado explora las estrategias comunicativas usadas por hablantes de inglés como *lingua franca* (ELF) durante su periodo de Erasmus en relación a el propósito de cada estartegia. Este ensayo comienza con una descripción del término ELF basada en teorías anteriores sobre este tema, incluyendo la investigación sobre las estrategias pragmáticas. El corpus usado para el análisis consiste en un conjunto de diez interacciones entre estudiantes Erasmus grabadas. En este ensayo, las estrategias se dividirán en tres categorías dependiendo de su función comunicativa: estrategias que se usan para reparar un problema comunicativo, estrategias que se usan para evitar un malentendido, y estrategias que se usa para construir relaciones de solidaridad y identdad. El análisis de datos demuestra como los usuarios de ELF se comunican de manera muy

coperativa y usan estrategias pragmáticas, combinándolas para conseguir sus propósitos

comunicativos.

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1. INTRODUCTION

English is used as the main lingua franca for intercultural communication amongst exchange Erasmus students in their "communities of practice", in which they develop social relationships and use English as a form of socialising (Kalocsai, 2014). It is, therefore, a medium for social interaction used to create bonds in a foreign country. As in any other ELF interaction, pragmatic strategies have a vital role in intercultural communication among Erasmus students, as they contribute to the creation of meaning and mutual understanding of the interlocutors and allow Erasmus students to express ther multilingual identity. They also mark a cooperative attitude from the interactants, which is widely seen in these Erasmus communicative contexts.

This essay aims to investigate the pragmatic strategies used in a corpus of authentic recorded conversations between students from different countries that were staying in Southampton (England) during their Erasmus period to provide insights into the use of ELF by this community of users.

The first part of this dissertation consists in the theoretical background, where ELF is conceptualised – emphasising the communicative purpose of ELF over its focus on form –, and a brief review of studies on pragmatic strategies in ELF interactions is presented, along with a brief explanation of Eramus programmes. After describing the corpus and the method of analysis, I will discuss the different strategies found in the corpus, analysing some fragments that illustrate these strategies, and derive some conclusions from them.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. ELF: definition

The contemporary context of increasing globalisation and internationalisation in almost every aspect of life has resulted in a need for a common language to serve as a means of international and intercultural communication between people from different countries with different native languages. The term used to refer to this shared language is *lingua franca*, which was defined by Gnutzmann (2000, p. 356) as "a language that is used as a medium of communication between people or groups of people each speaking a different native language". It is widely known that the language globally preferred to carry out this function is English. Thus, it is possible to talk about the term 'English as *a lingua franca*' (ELF), which has been argued to be different from other *linguas francas* due to its global status and to the fact that other *linguas francas* often have no native speakers (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 7).

One of the most prominent figures in this field, Jennifer Jenkins (2006, p. 157), offers a definition of ELF which includes a focus on the communication between participants of different "lingua-cultures": "ELF refers to English when it is used as a contact language across lingua-cultures whose members are in the main so-called nonnative speakers". In this definition, she is emphasising the close bond between the native language and the native culture in communication – which will be further explained in the analytical part of this essay. Speakers of ELF do not relate to English identity or to the culture of the native speakers of the English language (Edmondson and House, 2003). Thus, they do not necessary develop a sympathy towards the English identity and language but merely use the English language as a communication tool through which they can express their own cultural identities (Kumaravadivelu, 2012).

When defining ELF, Seidlhofer (2011) places the emphasis on the communicative function. She defines ELF as "any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option" (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 7). In other words, the ultimate goal of ELF is always communication and mutual understanding between its speakers.

The English language has already more non-native speakers than native speakers, as its ownership has become 'denationalized'; that is, it no longer belongs solely to its native speakers (House, 2003). According to House (2003, p. 557), ELF is characterised by its "functional flexibility in many different domains", as it is adapted to each ELF context and it is shaped by its speakers, so the features of ELF in each context depend on the participants' command of linguistic resources and on their individual communication purposes.

In order to fully understand ELF, it is necessary to distinguish it from other similar terms that differ from ELF in some aspects. Braj Kachru's World Englishes (WEs) paradigm (1985) is crucial for the understanding of some concepts related to ELF. Kachru's paradigm (1985), categorises English speakers into three "circles". The "inner circle" is composed by the countries with native speakers of English, who, according to Kachru, are the "norm-giving countries" (p. 356). The middle category is the "outer circle", which includes speakers from countries where English is the second language or an official language in the country, or it may have gained some other function for historical reasons. In Kachru's words, this is the "norm-developing group" (1985: 356). The third and last group is called the "expanding circle", and it refers to the speakers in the countries where English has no historical reasons to be used. For Kachru, these countries are "norm-dependent" (ibid.). This category includes the largest number of speakers, where English is a foreign language.

This does not mean that ELF is exclusively used by speakers from the countries in Kachru's "expanding circle", as it can also include speakers from the other circles when they engage in intercultural communication (IC), as their language is adapted for international use.

The framework of research on ELF in the early 2000s was influenced by the World Englishes paradigm already mentioned, and researchers aimed to describe a set of features to chararacterize ELF varieties (Jenkins, 2015). For that purpose, they analysed the items used by participants in ELF interactions, relating those items to their specific first language (ibid.). Jenkins (2015, p. 52) referred to this period as "ELF 1", that is, the phase one in ELF investigation, in which "two areas in particular were the focus of research attention: pronunciation and lexicogrammar" (Jenkins, 2015, p. 53).

However, Jenkins's (2015) argues that in the ELF 2 phase there was a reconceptualisation of the concept of ELF. Seidlhofer (2008) proposed a change in focus to "the processes underlying ELF's speakers variable use of forms", and posited that the concept of Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998) was therefore "a more appropriate way of approaching ELF than that of the traditional variety-oriented speech community" (Jenkins, 2015, p. 55). Thus, the focus when analysing ELF came to be its variability, and it was no longer defined as a variety.

Moreover, Jenkins believes that ELF is due for further reconceptualisation. The third phase in ELF, "ELF 3", is related to the "increasingly diverse multilingual nature of ELF communication" (Jenkins, 2015, p. 58). She argues that ELF is often regarded as having a 'multilingual repertoire', and that these communities of speakers are competent in more than one language - at least English and their L1. She mentions García's (2009) concept of "language continuum", according to which the languages that form the

linguistic repertoires of the bilingual and multilingual speakers influence each other. Thus, this third phase would be a retheorisation of ELF from a multilingual approach: "English as a Multilingua Franca". This concept refers to "multilingual communicative settings in which English is known to everyone present, and is therefore always potentially 'in the mix', regardless of whether or not, and how much, it is actually used" (Jenkins, 2015, p. 74). The analysis of ELF interactions presented in this essay shows some instances of multilingualism that can be associated to this theoretical phase.

Starting from the conceptualization of ELF as variable and inherently fluid (Jenkins, 2015) in this essay I will focus on the pragmatic strategies used among Erasmus students when they use English to engage in intercultural communication – that is, on the functional use of ELF – rather than on the "defining" formal features of ELF. It is important to highlight that communication is the ultimate goal of the use of ELF, so linguistic forms that deviate from the standard are not regarded as inappropriate as long as they achieve their purpose in communication.

2.2. Pragmatic strategies in ELF interactions

English has been used as a lingua franca in some parts of the world for many centuries (Jenkins, Cogo, & Dewey, 2011), but it was not until the second half of the 1990s that it began to be considered a field of study on its own. Recent research on ELF has investigated the pragmatic strategies used by ELF speakers to make communication effective in interactions which involved participants from different L1 backgrounds. Research has found that effectiveness in ELF interactions does not depend solely on a

high proficiency in English skills, but also on the mastery of these strategies (Mauranen, 2006; Björkman, 2014).

Researchers on pragmatic strategies in ELF (Björkman, 2014; Luzón, 2014) have found several types of strategies, according to the purpose for which they are used: (i) strategies to prevent breakdown in communication; (ii) strategies to repair problem in communication; (iii) strategies to construct solidarity relations and identity. A single strategy can serve different purposes, e.g. rephrasing can be used to prevent communication problems and to prevent them.

The assumption underlying the first type of strategies is that understanding is negotiated and temporarily accomplished, and it is constantly displayed in the communicative performance of the participants (Heritage, 1984). Thus, in a turn-to-turn sequence, every turn depends on the understanding on the previous one. Similarly, the next turn will serve as a means of demonstrating the understanding - or lack of understanding - of the message conveyed in the previous turn. In this process of meaning-making, these strategies (i) are used in order to avoid a potential problem in communication. They are used in ELF interactions when there is a risk of encountering a difficulty in communication that might lead to a misunderstanding. When speakers anticipate this problem, they use strategies to prevent the breakdown in communication (i) to improve the clarity and explicitness of the message, adjusting themselves to the interlocutors' linguistic proficiency and expectations, and thus enhancing intelligibility (Kalocsai, 2014). These strategies are common in ELF contexts because users of ELF are aware of their different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Jenkins (2000) studied how accommodation is a key factor for mutual understanding and, thus, can serve as a means of preventing misunderstanding. According

to her, "speakers need to develop their ability to adjust their pronunciation according to the communicative situation in which they find themselves" (Jenkins, 2000, p. 166). She further develops this idea by arguing that, in ELF interactions, the ideal of correct pronunciation of a word is not always the best option, as pronunciation can be accommodated to the pronunciations shared by the speakers in the interaction. This can be used as a strategy belonging to the first type or to the third one - as it also shows solidarity between the interactants.

This overlap in the functionality of the strategies is also reflected in Mauranen's (2006) study, as she proposes strategies that have been later understood as helpful both in type (i) and type (ii) contexts: she studied some strategies useful for the prevention of misunderstanding, mentioning confirmation checks, interactive repairs and self-repairs.

Cogo (2008) found that ELF interactions often involved three different languages: English and the respective native languages of the participants in that interaction. According to her, speakers of ELF tend to integrate some native words, expressions or norms in the ELF communication, which is a strategy known as code-switching. In a more recent study, Cogo (2009) also pointed out that ELF users tend to use repetition and code-switching as recurrent strategies for their understanding. These strategies are also often used as appropriate strategies for repairing a communication problem, thus belonging to the second type (ii).

Also in this category, Böhringer (2007) focused on the potential function of both silent and filled pauses in ELF, concluding that they served as a tool for gaining time for the encoding of a response, and that they can also be a useful means of creating meaning and even function as structural markers.

In relation to the second type of strategies (ii), research has provided striking results for ELF interaction (Cogo, 2009, p. 124). Even though one could assume that ELF communication is especially susceptible to misunderstanding because of the different lingua-cultures involved and the interactants' imperfect domain of the language, "ELF communication displays surprisingly few problematic moments, and the participants show skilful use of various strategies to prevent non-understanding and ensure the smooth running of talk" (ibid.).

Early findings on non-understanding include Lappalainen's (2001) study, which lists confirmation checks, repair requests and requests for clarification as useful strategies for signalling misunderstandings. Later research has studied how ELF users deal with communication breakdowns in different situations. Pitzl (2005) focused on non-understandings in the ELF used in business meetings, positioning herself in the view that ELF users can use linguist resources to solve communicative problems through cooperation and negotiation of meaning.

Similarly, Mauranen (2006) investigated strategies that are used for signalling misunderstanding in academic exchanges. She pointed out that the most common are the use of specific questions, the repetition of problematic items, and the indirect indication of misunderstandings. Mauranen (2007) emphasised how speakers in ELF academic communities "engage in a variety of adaptive strategies, among which cooperation and explicitness hold an important place" (p. 257). In this study, she mentioned three main strategies: self-rephrasing, negotiating topic and discourse reflexivity. These strategies could also serve as a means of preventing a breakdown in communication depending on the context - in other words, they can also be seen as part of the type (i) strategies.

Lastly, the third type of strategies includes those strategies used for expressing cooperation, construct solidarity relations between the interactants, and express their identity as belonging to a community of ELF users. In these communities, it is also often common to use strategies that create a sense of identity between the ELF speakers as belonging to the same group and, at the same time, being different from native speakers.

While studying these strategies, both Meierkord (2002) and Lesznyák (2002) found that a frequent strategy in ELF interaction was to use laughter as a means of back-channelling – that is, to show the speaker that they are understanding the message. The former also investigated verbal manifestations of culture in interactions among ELF speakers. This was further discussed by Pölzl (2003), who also reports on the use of L1 languages as a means of expressing cultural belonging.

Hülmbauer (2007, 2009) analysed a set of spoken interactions in which ELF users used non-standard forms in order to be understood. In other words, they adapted their language to the one of the interlocutor to create a suitable language that could be easily understood. According to her, "strategies range from doing away with redundancy and complexity to augmenting explicitness" (Hülmbauer, 2009, p. 335).

Kalocsai (2011) analysed how ELF users negotiated some linguistic resources in order to create links with other members of the ELF community. Similarly, Klimpfinger (2009) found that some strategies served as a means of signalling the identity and culture of the speaker, such as code-switching. This strategy is often used to show the multilingual identity of ELF speakers and their belonging to a community of practice - concept that will be explained in the next section.

In later research, Vettorel (2014) studied how commenting on the lack of proficiency in one's language abilities could function as a strategy to create a bond

between the rest of ELF speakers, as they would share a sense of belonging to a non-native group.

Luzón (2016) also analysed ELF strategies used by participants in travel blog discussions. Among these strategies, she mentioned backchanneling, code-switching, metacomments and "make-it-normal" as typical resources of ELF contexts that were used in these interactions in order to "support interaction, show listenership and rapport, construct solidarity and signal affiliation as members of the community" (Luzón, 2016, p. 145).

2.3. ELF among Erasmus students

Over the past few decades, the number of European students involved in mobility programmes has increased consistently. The Erasmus program started more than three decades ago, and it has influenced the language development of many students since then. According to the official website of the Erasmus Programme, "a period spent abroad not only enriches students' lives in the academic field but also in the acquisition of multicultural skills and self reliance" (Education and Training - European Commission, 2019).

Exchange students's main purpose for using ELF is often socialisation and community building, which has received little focus on previous research. Kalocsai (2009) examined the processes of gaining cultural and linguistic knowledge through participation in an exchange program. Her findings showed that ELF was not the only language they used during their interactions. In order to refer to the group of Erasmus students, she uses the concept of "community of practice", which has been defined as "an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor (...)

ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations – in short, practices – emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor." (Eckert and McConnel-Ginet, 1992: 463). This is a more appropriate notion to refer to ELF users than the term "speech communities", mainly because "they are linguistically heterogeneous, and often dislocated; and (…) they do not speak a variety in any traditional sense of the notion, but rather negotiate their norms of speaking" (Kalocsai, 2014: 52).

Early conceptualisations of the notion of "community of practice" included three core dimensions in its definition: mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire (Lave and Wegner, 1991). The first dimension refers to regular interactions among the members, and requires the development of social relations in the community and the definition of identities of every person involved. The second dimension is concerned with the shared aim of the community and the ways in which they try to achieve in. Lastly, the "shared repertoire" alludes to their resources, including their linguistic competence and the terminology they use. These dimensions are in continuous change, they are constantly being defined and redefined by the members of the community (Kalocsai, 2014).

Through mutual engagement in a variety of contexts such as in daily coexistence, the participation in different activities, travels, and social events – some of which are exemplified in the recorded corpus of the analysis –, Erasmus students developed a relationship and form a "community of practice", in which they learn new forms of communication and develop their Erasmus identity. Their linguistic and social goals develop in this environment, and they develop practices and resources to adapt and achieve their goal. Their shared repertoires might include routines, concepts, stories and vocabulary developed by its members.

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The data for this research consists in a small scale corpora of spoken ELF interactions among Erasmus students, which are analysed from a pragmatic perspective to investigate the communicate strategies used in contexts where English is used a means for intercultural communication. In order to compile the corpus, I recorded ten ELF interactions while being in Southampton during my Erasmus semester. As a result, the situations presented are situations that I believe to be common in the Erasmus experience of most of the students involved in this program, such as meetings with other exchange students, at-home situations with people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and a taxi ride home after a night out. English is extensively used in these settings to establish social relations with students from different countries and to communicate with the locals. Consequently, the corpus used for the analysis, even though is very limited, shows a wide variety of strategies, which will be analysed in the following section.

The data in the corpus used for the present study comprises ten interactions recorded during speech events in informal meetings where people from different L1 backgrounds used English as a lingua franca to communicate and establish social relations between them. All the conversations in the recordings arose naturally, they were not planned in advance, and they were collected in very different situations. The recordings amount to a total of almost three hours. These data constitute therefore only a small sample of ELF interactions, and a more extensive corpus would be needed in order to conduct a thorough investigation.

Although the participants involved in the study are mainly non-native speakers of English, there are three native participants – two from England and one from Ireland –

who may representative of native-speakers' attitude and understanding in these settings. The rest of the participants come from diverse L1 backgrounds: there are participants from Denmark, Germany, Spain and Georgia. They were Erasmus programme students who temporarily studied at the University of Southampton during the academic year 2018/2019, and were part of a "community of practice" with other exchange students, except from the participant from Georgia, who worked as a taxi-driver. He is also the only participant who was not aged between 19 – 23 as the others. Their level of English varies, but they are regarded as users of ELF for communication purposes, rather than learners of English, so their language competence is not regarded as defective or erroneous, as it is not compared to the level of proficiency of a native speaker of English.

The study presented in this essay is a qualitative analysis. The purpose of this study is to show how Erasmus students reach their communicative goals by using pragmatic strategies, rather than quantifying the strategies used. The corpus was coded to determine all the strategies used by the participants, but due to space constraints only the most frequent strategies are discusssed and illustrated here. All the strategies discussed below (section 4.2.) are used frequently and systematically use – they are not isolated cases –, which often reveals patterns of use.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Strategies found in the corpus

The fragments in the analysis are selected fragments from the ten transcribed extracts of naturally-occurring ELF recorded conversations that are representative of the instances of the pragmatic features that are more frequent in the ELF interactions of the corpus. These examples are the basis for the qualitative analysis of strategies presented below. Once again, it is necessary to mention that the same strategy may be used with different purposes, so the following categories are not completely fixed.

Among the first type of strategies, (i) strategies to prevent breakdown in communication, the most commonly used by the speakers in the recorded data when they anticipate a problem and want to solve it beforehand are:

a)   Confirmation checks, which can be represented by minimal checks or can be more explicitly indicated.

b)   Interactive repairs. When using this strategy, "speakers in multiparty encounters often engage in co-construction of expressions, just as people do in dyadic interaction" (Mauranen, 2006, p. 137).

c)   Self-repair is a very constant strategy in this set of data, and it refers to the speaker's rephrasing of their own speech. It is often an adjustment of the form rather than of the meaning that the speaker wants to convey. By rephrasing his or her own speech, the speaker is anticipating a problem in the interaction.

d)   Circumlocution is the pragmatic strategy that involves the description or exemplification of the object or action in an attempt to solve the lack of knowledge of a linguistic item.

e)   Approximation is the use of an alternative similar word which "expresses the meaning of the target lexical item as closely as possible" (Björkman, 2014, p. 125).

f)   Use of all-purpose words. That is, "extending a general, empty lexical item to contexts where specific words are lacking" (ibid.).

g)   Use of fillers, hesitation devices and flow-keepers in order to fill pauses and gain time to understand the meaning of the interlocutor's message or to think about how to correctly convey one's message.

h)   Let-it-pass is a strategy used when the misunderstanding is thought to be "inconsequential for the successful ongoing of the conversation" (Cogo and Dewey, 2006, p. 66). By means of this strategy, "the hearer thus lets the unknown or unclear action, word or utterance 'pass' on the (common-sense) assumption that it will either become clear or redundant as talk progresses" (Firth, 1996, p. 240).

The most repeated instances of strategies used to repair problem in communication (ii) in the transcripts of the analysed corpus are:

a)   Specific questions, which are "focused questions on an expression or its meaning are perhaps the easiest to detect and also the most unequivocal signs of lack of understanding" (Mauranen, 2006, p. 132). The lack of comprehension might be total – if the message is completely non-understood –, or partial – if the interactant has not understood an individual lexical item or part of the message, and is solved through a request of clarification.

b)   Repetition of problematic items. This strategy concerns the meaning of an individual linguistic item and is simply marked by the repetition of the problematic item. As Cogo (2009) pointed out, this strategy can be divided in "other-repetition", that is,

when one interactant repeats the words that another interactant has already said; and "self-repetition", i.e. the repetition performed by the original speaker.

c) Indirect signalling of misunderstanding. This happens when there is some indication that there has been a misunderstanding but it is unfocused and gives little indication of what is unclear to the speaker" (Mauranen, 2006, p. 134).

d) Utterance completion refers to the strategy in which an interlocutor completes the message of the current speaker, and it can be used when the speaker is struggling to find a word or a form to convey the message. It also shows the involvement and support of the listener, so it can be presented as part of the (iii) group of strategies in the data analysis section.

e) Paraphrasing is a strategy that has been defined as "providing the same content by modifying the previous utterance or ongoing utterance" (Björkman, 2014, p. 131).

f) Lexical suggestion refers to the suggestion of a term by another interlocutor.

Lastly, the most commonly used (iii) strategies to construct solidarity relations and identity in the corpus are:

a) Backchanneling is probably the most common strategy used to construct solidarity relations in the ELF interactions in the corpus. It refers to the use of expressions to show listenership and interest in the subject or understanding to the speaker (Luzón, 2016).

b)   Code-switching is primarily defined as a sudden switch into another language. It is "often a creative way to facilitate intercultural communication, to express a multilingual identity, and to signal solidarity and group membership" (Luzón, 2016, p. 138). The switch into a language other than English can be both into the speaker's L1 or to the L1 of one of the other participants in the interaction – the latter can be associated to Rampton's (1995) notion of "language crossing". This feature has been found to be a very prominent linguistic resource to signal the multilingual identity of the members of the community.

c)   Metacomments, which are comments about the ongoing language that is being used by the interactants or on the interactants' communicative behaviour (Luzón, 2016). It includes comments on terms and concepts that might be problematic for the ELF users.

d)   Comprehension checks are generally questions asked by the speaker in order to confirm that the listener has understood the message and is following the conversation.

e)   Co-creating the message refers to when two or more speakers "fill in the blanks in each other's utterances in an effort to produce a complete utterance, which in turn means a complete message" (Björkman, 2014). This strategy creates a solidarity relation because it includes the cooperation of the interactants, but can also be understood as a strategy for preventing a breakdown in communication.

The corpus of recorded interactions analysed shows a constant appearenec of these strategies in a non-isolated manner. ELF users are constantly combining them in order to achieve their communicative purposes effectively.

4.2. Discussion of examples

The following extracts have been selected in order to exemplify some of the pragmatic strategies of ELF communication that have been found in the corpus of naturally-occurring conversations among the members of an Erasmus community of practice.

In the first extract, S1 is a L1 Spanish speaker, S2 is a native speaker of English and S3 is a L1 Danish speaker.

Extract 1

S1[1]: did you get any other presents?
S2: hm?
S1: did you get any other presents?
S2: did I get any what?
S3: other presents
S2: oh! (.) My mum said we'll go on holiday and Jaimie gave me a raincoat and (.) I got a handbag and also the earrings

This extract is an instance of a breakdown in communication: S2 has a problem (a native speaker of English) understanding the question of S1. This might be due to the accent of S1, which, as analysed in Cogo's (2016) study, can lead to problems with intelligibility in native speakers of English. S2 indirectly signals misunderstanding by means of a non-verbal indicator ("Hm?"). S1 attempts to solve the problem in communication by repeating the same question she had already asked but, once again, S2 does not seem to understand it. This time, she uses a specific question to request clarification on the one item she is not understanding, and repeats the part of the message that she has already understood ("did I get any what?"). At this point, S3 decides to take

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[1] See appendix for transcription conventions

part in the conversation, and repeats the part of the message that was problematic for S2 ("other presents"). By doing this, she is demonstrating that she had already understood the other Erasmus student, and she shows her involvement in the conversation and provides support by helping the other interactants. Furthermore, this last part of the interaction might rise the question of whether non-native speakers – who in this case are members of the Erasmus community of practice – have more resources to understand other non-native speakers using ELF than native speakers of English. In this respect,

Extract 2

S1: I got flowers, like (.) from my first boyfriend when I was (.) I think that when I (.) when I turned 17 or 18 and when I got home my mum was so excited that I went there with a (.) what's the name of that thing?

S2: bouquet

S1: when you have more than one flower, like a lot of roses=

S2: =a bouquet

S1: is that it?

S2: yeah!

S1: ok (.) so I got there with my bouquet of roses and she was so excited, she came with the camera like "I need to take a picture!" (.) but it was a really bad picture

The extract above is part of a conversation between S1, a L1 Spanish speaker; and S2, a L1 Danish speaker. It illustrates how S1 overcomes the lack of knowledge of a specific lexical item by appealing for S2's help. In her first turn, S1 uses some pragmatic strategies to prevent a breakdown in communication, such as the use of pauses and the filler "like", which has no meaning in this context and whose only purpose is to gain time to think about the way the message is going to be conveyed. There is also self-repair and self-repetition strategies ("when I was (.) I think that when I (.) when I turned") that show uncertainty and show that the speaker is unsure about her speech, but serve to keep the flow of the conversation going. Then, S1 encounters a problem, as she wants to use an

item that is not in her linguistic repertoire. She explicitly asks S2 for help by means of a specific question that includes an all-purpose word ("what's the name of that thing?"). S2 seems to know the response and makes a lexical suggestion, but S1 does not seem to hear her response. Another possibility is that, as she is not familiar with the term, she might think that S2 has not understood the question. S1 uses the strategy of circumlocution – as she is still trying to solve the problem in communication –, and she describes and exemplifies the target lexical item ("when you have more than one flower, like a lot of roses"). S2 repeats the word ("bouquet"), confirming that she had already found the correct item. After a confirmation check ("is that it?"), S1 finally seems to include the word bouquet in her linguistic repertoire and completes the message. This extract illustrates a clear cooperation in the co-creation of the message and willingness to help amongst the participants and an awareness of the weak spots of the other members of the community of practice, which is a sign of solidarity between them.

Strategies to express solidarity are also present in the extract below, in which the interlocutors are the same Erasmus students as in the previous interaction – thus, S1 is a L1 Spanish speaker, and S2 a L1 Danish speaker.

Extract 3

S1: yeah (.) so he has a girlfriend from Germany and every time he brings her home everyone's like "Laura, you sit with her"

S2: oh, because you're the only one that speaks English?

S1: yeah (.) and I'm a bit (.) because I don't know her, you know?=

S2: =yeah.

S1: I don't know what to say and (.)

S2: yeah (.) it's a little bit of pressure

S1: yeah (.) but they talk between them and I can't really hear what they're saying

S2: oh (.) but does he speak German? No?

S1: they speak in English

This interaction exemplifies a supportive attitude from S2, as she uses pragmatic strategies to reflect her understanding and interest at some points where S1 doubts about how to express the message appropriately. An illustrative example of this is the constant use of backchannel responses ("yeah, oh") that indicate that she is paying attention to the interlocutor. Furthermore, the message is co-created at some points when S1 is struggling to keep the conversation going, as when S1 does not find the words to finish the sentence "I don't know what to say and (.)", and S2 decides to intercede and complete the utterance herself. This way she is demonstrating that she has understood what S1 is trying to say ("yeah (.) it's a little bit of pressure"), which S2 confirms in the following turn. Some other remarkable aspects of this interaction is the use of the flow-keeper *you know?* and of the lexical item *No?* instead of a question tag as a confirmation check, which is a recurrent strategy amongst the Erasmus community that occurs constantly in the recorded corpus.

Extract 4

S1: sorry if it's too much trouble

S2: no, it's not trouble for me, it was not for you (.) yeah, I'm fine

S1: *laughs* was it a busy night?

S2: yeah, very busy! (.) like Christmas day

S1: a lot of people were going out

S2: yeah (.) but I expected today more (.) cause the weather is all right (.) no so cold

S1: what?

S2: not so cold (.) outside (.) understand?

S1: oh, no, it's not that cold (.) I thought it was gonna be colder but it's not

The speakers in the extract above are an Erasmus student (S1) and a Georgian taxi driver (S2). The let-it-pass principle is adopted from the first turn of S2, as the sentence

is ungrammatical, but S1 does not correct it and responds with laughter, which is probably used a backchanneling strategy. Later on, there is another problem in communication that S1 tries to solve by means of a specific question ("what?") to request repetition. S2 realises the problem and repeats the last part of his previous message ("not so cold"), but this time he tries to enhance S1's understanding by adding more information ("outside"). Then, he uses the word "understand?" as a comprehension check to see if S1 has understood the message. This is followed by the use of the other-repetition strategy, as she rephrases the message to confirm that the problem in communication has been solved.

Extract 5

S1: ¿de sobre habláis?
S2: hm?
S1: ¿de sobre habláis?
S2: ¿de qué (.) habláis?
S1: ah okay (.) ¿de qué?
S2: I don't know (.) Martina, ¿de qué habláis?
S3: about a festival

Extract 6 is part of a conversation that took part in a social encounter between several L1 Spanish speakers Erasmus students and a L1 German Erasmus student (S1). It should be taken into account that S1 is trying to use Spanish as a means of communicating with the other interactants even if her level of proficiency is probably low. This can be seen as a code-switching strategy used to create a bond with the rest of the community of practice. After correcting her, S1 responds in the lingua franca, that is, in English, but she code-switches again to Spanish when addressing S3. This illustrates how the members of the community of practice that share a native language use their L1 at some points to make communication easier, but they switch to ELF when talking to speakers of different linguistic backgrounds.

Extract 6

S1: so what does she do there?

S2: umm (.) she is in one of the (.) like (.) I don't know how to explain that, do you know these places where you throw (.) these things=

S1: =darts?

S2: darts, yeah (.) and you get something

The extract above is part of a conversation between a German and a Spanish Erasmus student. It is an example of how the interlocutors use the strategy of co-creating the message, as both cooperate to achieve mutual understanding. S2 seems to be struggling to find the word "darts" in her linguistic repertoire, and she explicitly comments on her language abilities ("I don't know how to explain that") to make S1 aware of the difficulty she is encountering. She also uses a filler ("like") in order to gain time to solve the problem. S2 uses the strategy of circumlocution – she tries to define the item – to repair the breakdown in communication, but she is interrupted by a lexical suggestion from S1 ("darts?"). This interactive repair is followed by a confirmation by means of a repetition. After solving the problem, S2 goes on with the explanation.

Extract 7

S1: but the family had already lost a kid before (.) like (.) the other one, he had a (.) sudden death? I don't know if that's the correct word=

S2: =a what?

S1: sudden death, like he (.) ¿cómo se dice muerte súbita?

S3: sudden death?

S1: yeah, that's what I said

S2: oh! (.) like a heart attack or something

S1: yeah

The interactants in the extract above are the same as the ones in Extract 6, with the incorporation of another L1 Spanish speaker, S3. In this part of the interaction, S1 is unsure about the correctness of the term "sudden death". There are some pauses and a filler ("like") in her turn that show her uncertainty. She also makes a metacomment about the term after saying it ("I don't know if that's the correct word"). When S2 asks a specific question to signal misunderstanding, S1 decides to check the correctness of the term, and uses the strategy of code-switching to ask S3, who has the same linguistic background. S3 confirms the accuracy of the term, switching the language of the conversation to English again. Lastly, S2 uses the strategy of approximation and an all-purpose word ("a heart attack or something"), probably to check that she has understood the term correctly, which is confirmed by S1.

5. CONCLUSION

This corpus-based qualitative study has analysed some of the pragmatic strategies used amongst Erasmus exchange students using ELF when socialising within their community of practice. The analysis of these strategies revealed that they are used for several function depending on the communicative needs of the interactants. As a result, the strategies have been categorised into three categories according to their function: strategies used to prevent misunderstandings, strategies used to repair a misunderstanding, and strategies used to show solidarity and identity.

Considering the pragmatic strategies analysed in the data, it is worth noting the flexibility in function of the strategies, as the same strategy can be used for various purposes depending on each communicative situation. This lack of rigidity contributes to the constant use of these strategies, which have been proved to be essential for achieving the communicative purposes of Erasmus speakers. Its frequency results in the infrequent occurrence of misunderstandings that has been reported in ELF communicative contexts (Björkman, 2014). This is certainly true for the Erasmus speakers in the present analysed data as well. The speakers in the interactions investigated seem to be prepared for misunderstandings, and they are insistent on the achievement of mutual understanding. It is also remarkable that the corpus shows this willingness to cooperate and achieve successful communication, as the interactants tend to use various strategies if one of them does not seem to achieve a total understanding.

Cooperation is also remarkable in the recorded interactions, which can be related to the concept of community of practice, as its members are aware of the limitations of their peers and use diverse pragmatic strategies to mark solidarity and collaboration.

Lastly, the presence of other native languages different from English is clearly visible in the corpus. This can be related to Jenkins (2015)'s reconceptualization of English as a *multilingual franca*, as it has been proved that English is not the only language used in these communicative context. However, further research is needed on this topic.

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APPENDIX: transcription conventions.

- S1: S2: S3…: Speakers numbered in the order they first speak.

- (.): Pause.

- =: Other continuation.