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"An Exception to the Rule? How ELF in academic settings may be an exception to the new conceptualisation of ELF as a mode of communication"
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I. Brief Characterization of the Thesis

The dissertation examines the processes that occur in language contact within a specific academic setting, where participants draw on the linguistic resources available in their linguistic repertoires. These resources can be described in terms of bunded languages and include English as the contact language. The situation defines the use of English as that of lingua franca (ELF) communication. However, the thesis argues that this status differs from the classic ELF understanding, as English is used exonormatively, rather than representing, in its current conceptualization, an endonormative multilingual mode of communication, which the author considers an "exception to the rule". The issue under discussion is among the most controversial and dynamically developing topics within Global Englishes (GE), addressing several of its key problems and challenges, while at the same time introducing certain controversies of its own, as discussed below.

II. Brief Overall Evaluation of the Thesis

The thesis is certainly an important contribution to the on-going debate, what Seidlhofer refers to as filling the "conceptual gap", on how to conceptualize English used in intecultural situations within the expanding circle (rather than "outer circle", 11) of Englishes (Kachru). It addresses English as a language of choice among non-native speakers, who constitute the majority of its users and among whom, globally, the centre of "gravity" has shifted. By examining how users within one specific academic community of practice themselves conceptualize English through the lens of language management (LM) concepts (follow-up interviews, presentational vs. propositional self-repair), the author advances ELF research by eliciting from these users what they themselves believe about whether they employ ELF endonormatively as a multilingual lingua franca (EMLF) or exonormatively as an interlanguage. I believe the use of LM to study ELF processes is appropriate, as it directly accesses participants´ own conceptualizations and complements theoretical perspectives (including the author´s own) beliefs about ELF processes from an external szandpoint. However, as I discuss further below, the theoretical-methodological combination, though beneficial for both ELF and LMT, is not entirely unproblematic.

III. Detailed Evaluation of the Thesis and Its Individual Aspects

1.Structure of Argumentation

Overall, the argumentation is transparent and systematic, and its main line of reasoning is developed thoughtfully and consistently. The central claim - that for defining ELF requires considering how its users self-identify, i.e., whether they see themselves as learners of (exonormative) EFL or as users of (endornormative) ELF – can be empirically investigated. The distinction can be detected by examining whether speakers use self-repairs predominantly for presentational purposes (prioritizing normative accuracy) or for propositional purposes (prioritizing communicative efficacy) is certainly researchable. However, I believe it is rather the situation itself that defines ELF setting – namely the use of English in the "Third Space" where it is no one´s native language and all users must learn how to use it (Seidlhofer, 2012).

The claim that, in the examined academic setting, ELF is reified through speakers´ self-repairs to become "closely alinged with Standard British or US English" (26) - i.e., used exonormatively rather than endonormatively - is presented as an exception to the conceptualization of ELF as the use of communicative strategies rather than adherence to a set

of rules. This interpretation, however, is somewhat problematic, given that the output of proficient ELF users may be undistinguishable from that of "native speakers" (cf. temporary communities of practice (CoP) emerging in debates at international conferences, or in international journals where a significant number of contributors are non-native speakers). For example, in the self-repair presented on p. 56 (bottom), the use of definite article is not incorrect in an "exonormative manner"; rather, it is endo-normative, as it conforms to high proficiency ELF norms. In fact, it would be considered "wrong" in any "acrolectal" variety of English, including the "inner circle" Englishes. This observation problematizes the hypothesis that ELF is used exonormatively in this particular setting, which may instead be influenced some participants´ low self-perception of their own proficiency level.

There are a few terminological issues, which is not surprising, given that ELF research itself is under development - currently ints fourth phase, in which English is situated within the broader concept of "Multilingualism with English as a LF" (Baker, Ishikawa, Jenkins, 2025). While the claim that ELF cannot be described as a „variety", i.e. as a bounded system, because it lacks unique common features, is acceptable, it should be complemented by an additional reason, namely, that no stable ELF community exists that can be described in terms of state, nation, or ethnicity. Rather, ELF represents a kind of "performance variety/performlect", rather than a (single) communicative event (5), it is a performance-based, emergent, co-produced, fluid, in-situ mode (Mortensen) of English use, which comes into being by virtue of its being enacted in the process of "languaging". Therefore, I believe, there is no such thing as "ELF spoken in Prague" (17); rather, there are only ELF situations in which speakers draw primarily on the lexico-grammatical resources available to them in their multilingual repertoires - resources that can be assigned to "English" (which is why this lect remains a lect of "English"). At the same time, they also draw, to varying degrees, on their L1 (phonological, pragmatic) substrata. They do so in a „similectal" way - hence Mauranen´s term similect becomes jusified, rather tan "fragile" (17), since it is precisely this feature ELF users are recognizeable as Czechs, French, Germans etc., provided that participants in ELF communication are familiar with their interlocutors´L1s.

The question of whether some form of stability leading to the establishment of a common pool of resources can emerge can be answered positively, since over time, repeated encounters in certain CoPs may lead to relatively stabilized communicative practices. Furthermore, I am sceptical about whether exonormative presentational LM (EPLM) is a constitutive feature of ELF and not L1 interactions. In my opinion, this type of self-repair, aimed at aligning the language used with perceived norms, occurs in any interaction where normativity is an issue, including L1 communication (e.g., example, Slovak speakers may correct themselves by replacing sub/non-standard or foreign items with standard (literary) forms, as the ideology of prescriptivism/purism discourages the use of foreignisms/bohemisms such as *pomazánka, lízatko, kojenec, sranda*, among others).

When discussig Kachru´s model, it should be noted that distinction is also made between ENL, ESL and EFL, and that the expanding circle space is shared by both (endonormative) ELF and (exonormative) EFL. The latter is typically present in state-run eduaction systems, where the notion of native speaker may still be appropriate, but only in its denotational sense, referring to someone whose L1 is English. Regarding the problem of defining NS and the impossibility of pinning it down globally, several alternative terms have been proposed that replace "genetic" nativeness with a focus on proficiency: functional NS (Yano, Graddol), experts (Rampton), and monolingual English speakers (Jenkins).

Another problem lies in removing the concept of a lingustic system from any form communication, since it constitutes the very core of the scientific study of language. Therefore, the claim that "it is fine to argue that there is no system, and it is therefore pointless to research one" (22), or that "ELF is not itself a system, its speakers appear to be struggling to align it with

such a system" (25) is problematic and requires further explanation. The fact remains that both ELF and EFL users must draw on systems of repertoires, although the norms may originate from different "centres" of competence: L2 users in ELF/EMLF and L1 users in EFL contexts. The assumption expressed in the statement "If ELF is being used as a mode of communication independent of any kind of system-based framework, then no presentational adjustment would be needed" (58) is questionable. Can any efficient communication in ELF settings truly operate without some form of underlying system?

Rather than being conceived as genres (16), "varieties" across different fields/domains of English use (commerce, academia) would be better described as registers or situlects.

The list of officially recognized national minorities in the Czech Republic (17) does not include the Slovak nationality (most probably, Slovenian is intended to refer to Slovak).

The claim that the concern for the constructing the identity of knowlegeable, competent experts in academia is more prominent than in the domain of business is problematic, since identity construction is pervasive in all domains. Moreover, separating the propositional function (concern for clarity, efficacy) from the presentational "layer" (21) appears somewhat artificial, as both are present across domains and often overlap or are mutually undistinguishable.

Regarding the methodology, the follow-up interviews are used skilfully to detect how "co-analysis" takes place and to reduce the researcher´s bias and thus produce more valid findings (see e.g.. p.50 where the researcher´s classification is corrected). However, a problem arises when the intervewee must reconstruct events from memory, whih may lead tp speculation about what actually occurred and thereby cast doubt on the accuracy of classifications. Such evidence cannot be considered "empirical proof" (51) and, as the author himself admits, opens the possibility of erroneous conclusions. As a solution, the author argues that the data do not serve to dis/prove hypothesis but rather provide a "useful guideline that might point us in the direction of hypothesis" (51), or even "a useful impression" (51). This position is problematic, as it points to a potential weakness of the research, i.e., to the quality and formulation of the "hypotheses", or assumptions, which shuld have been addressed prior to the launch of the study.

Another issue concerns the judgement of "presentational repairs" (e.g., 52) in terms of whether an item conforms to SBE usage. The author relies on his own intuition, which is not necessarily "correct" or the only possibilile interpretation, given that language use involves tendencies and probabilities, e.g., "the adverb (justly) is likely to be used much more frequently" (52). This creates a paradoxical situation: the author identifies the inherent variability judgements in ENL as a problem that should not be transferred to ELF situations, yet he simultaneously expects ELF users to emulate norms even when natives themselves "do not adhere to the rules of their own system" (54). Instead, he advocates for an adaptable ELF mode, where efficiency takes precedence over adherence to exonormative norms, which are inherently fluid and subject to change.

Regarding the answer to Question 1 (46), I believe the research question is (positively) answered rather than confirmed. What is confirmed is the presupposed assumption/hypothesis, i.e., that there is a prevalence of presentational LM. The notion of hypothesis is not used terminologically as a testable statement that can be dis/proved, but rather as an assumption that can be in/correct (48), and which is embedded within the 1st RQ.

Another issue concerns the simplistic either/or binary classification (which the author himself admits, 31, 53), as it may affect the validity of data. The question thus remains: to what degree of certainty can a particular instance be classified as one or the other, in a way that produces meaningful, i.e., reliable data. This leaves the issue of the reliability of research open for further discussion.

There is a confusing remark (p. 56, top): the repair is classified as presentational by both the researcher and the participant, so it is unclear how this example confirms the assumption (in RQ1) regarding the prevalence of propositional self repairs.

The problems with classification, which are directly linked to the justification of the hypothesis, are acknowledged (44). This, however, further problematizes the somewhat artificial separation between the two types of self-repairs. E.g., the indefinite article in *a royal* (65) does carry semantic (grammatical) value – indefiniteness, which is essentially a pragmatic phenomenon. Therefore, its repair may involve propositional, rather than merely presentational, meaning. This interpretation is supported by the subsequent example (65 bottom) involving the definite article.

2. Formal Level of the Thesis

The thesis is written in a narrative-like style, presenting the reader with detailed insights into the author´s process of deliberation and the considerations made during the research. This is not necessarily a drawback, however, there is a degree of repetition and redundancy, which comes at the expense of compactness and conciseness. Furthermore, the submtted version of the thesis lacks in-text section numbering of sections, and the titles of subchapters do not fully correspond to those listed in Contents.

There are occassional misprints: are like to be (17), Slovenian (17), outness (21), Maureen (22), prepositional (60), owns (64), is importance (65), if it is born in mind (69); syntactic contaminations: e.g. "…when listeners´ acceptance of non-standard multi-word units Mauranen notes that …" (26), In fact, although participant L1 stated that a lack of English vocabulary prevented him from ELF identifying, all participants did in fact draw on different areas of their linguistic resource where needed to efficient communicative effect (42); From this it may be assumed that means that the self-repair is propositional (60); **grammar issues**: serves to highlights, the utterances was not in fact… (52), is change (58); It would be important to look not the number of self-repairs (94).

3.Work with Sources or Research Material

The work with both the current sources and original research data is highly innovative.

4. Original Contribution

The thesis represents a highly relevant and original contribution to ongoing debates in several interrelated areas of contemporary sociolinguistics, including the sociolinguistics of globalization, multilingualism and ELF. It enriches these fields by integrating concepts and methodologies from the LMT, thereby offering a valuable interdisciplinary perspective.

IV. Questions for the Defense

1. "Exception to the rule" – it woud be useful to clarify **what exactly is meant by a "rule"** in this context. In the conceptualization of English as global multilingual communicative mode (MELF), does it refer to endonormativeness, similar to how it is undrestoond in World Englishes approaches?

2. Does the repair of *extin* to *destroyed* (38) illustrate a propositional or presentational LM? The categorization is unclear – as the author himself admits (44). It is claimed that although *extin* is comprehensible, it is repaired to bring to align with SBE norms, and is therefore treated as an "error" (44). However, could this not rather be considered an innovation? In ELF communication, participants also orient to a linguistic system and are aware that any departure from it may threaten intelligibility. Yet, in innovations such as this, speakers can signal creativity, e.g., by using air quotes, to indicate that the (potential) form *were extincted* is a nonce-word which his used for a specific occasion only. This illustrates creativity, flexibility

and fluidity as features of (not only) ELF, contributes to the construction of their ELF identity. The system is sustained by competent users of E such as T1 (C2 proficiency level), who belong to the centre of global Englishes - highly proficiency speakers, or functional natives, regardless of their origin (cf. Graddol 2006). Could this, then, be a case of T1´s conformity to endonormative ELF norms (propositional LM), rather than to exonormative EFL norms (presentational LM)?

3. The concept of *languaging* appears to be used somewhat indiscriminately – what exactly is the rationale for its use (e.g. "what intentions speakers may have whilst languaging" (58), rather than "using language"? What are the the theoretical or analytical implications of this terminological choice for the thesis as a whole?

4.Why is "we don´t hear you" (59) non-standard English? While it may be less idiomatically or pragmatically marked, it is grammatically correct. In ELF setting, such phrasing may result from pragmatic transfer from Czech, rather than from non-standard grammar.

5. It appears that some participants in this ELF setting are positioned between the EFL/ESL and ELF paradigms, navigating competing sources of normativity. Would it be possible to educate them and encourage them to adopt a paradigmatic shift – extending World Englishes/Kachru´s claim that acrolectal Outer Circle Es should be regarded as comparable with standard Inner Circle Es, to be applied to ELF situations and make acrolectal Expanding Circle Es comparable to standard Inner Circle Es – so that this principle is also applied to ELF contexts., making acrolectal Expanding Circle Englishes (performance varieties) comparable with standard Inner Circle varieties? In this way, ELF users would cease to view their English as an interlanguage - an imperfectly learned form they are unlikely to ever fully "complete" -and would see themselves as fully competent users. This reconceptualization could reduce the cognitive load associated with aligning their usage to NS norms and allow them to focus more on content. Such a shift might, in turn, lead to a change in perception away from the speaker´s current view of "language they use not to be ELF, but an inferior interlanguage" (74), which is the central thesis of the study. How realistic or feasible is do you consider this initiative to be in practical and pedagogical terms?

Note: a sense of uncertainty, yet also a certain hope for the future, is evident in SF (78), who is not explicitly aware of the concept of ELF, but acknowledges being less concerned about presentational SR in ELF settings. Nevertheless, she still corrects herself in an attempt to align more closely with BE norms, albeit unsuccessfully. Could it be that the expression "by foot" is not an EFL error but rather an ELF "innovation"? SF, in fact, appears to be approaching an ELF user (C2 proficiency level), even without conscious awareness of the concept itself.

V. Conclusion

The submitted dissertation **meets** the requirements placed on a dissertation thesis; therefore, I **recommend** it for defense and **provisionally classify** it as **pass**.

7 November 2025 Prof. PhDr. Milan Ferenčík, PhD.