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Communities of practice and English as a lingua franca

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Introduction

A community of practice is a group of people who regularly interact with each other by means of a shared communicative repertoire in order to accomplish a common task. In the process, a great deal of informal learning is taking place. Old-timers show newcomers the ropes, newcomers may inspire longer-term members to rethink and innovate established practices. In today's globalized world, such purpose-oriented endeavours increasingly bring together people from diverse linguacultural backgrounds who use and develop, among other resources, English as a lingua franca as part of their communicative repertoire.

The term "community of practice", coined by Lave and Wenger (1991: 97–98), was developed by Wenger (1998) as the essence of his social theory of learning. In its 1998 incarnation, the concept has developed an enormous impact, both as a heuristic notion and as an educational model, and has been applied in a wide range of disciplines (Squires and van de Vanter 2013). While celebrated and applied as a knowledge management tool in organizational and business studies (e.g. Wenger *et al.* 2002), it has also been applied, mostly in its analytical capacity, in fields such as education and sociolinguistics (e.g. Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999; Barton and Tusting 2005a; Hughes *et al.* 2007), accompanied by insightful critical debates.

With regard to ELF theorizing, the potential relevance of the concept of community of practice was first discussed by House (2003).[1] In an attempt to find an adequate notion to conceptualize the sociolinguistic realities of multilingual ELF speakers globally, it was initially considered a possible alternative to the established concept of the speech community. However, as is argued in Ehrenreich (2009: 130), as a "midlevel category" (Wenger 1998: 124) the concept of community of practice generally describes smaller and more cohesive group configurations and is therefore not a suitable candidate for such re-conceptualization efforts (see also Jenkins 2015: 64–66).

With regard to empirical ELF research, however, it is a very different story. Although utilized as a framework in only a handful of studies so far – Ehrenreich (2009, 2010, 2011a) and Alharbi (2015) in the domain of international business, and Smit (2010), Cogo and

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Dewey (2012) and Kalocsai (2014) in the domain of higher education – the concept has been shown to be a powerful analytical tool. If applied to suitable contexts, it enables socially situated explorations and analyses of ELF; analyses that help to (re-)direct the focus in ELF research to the social embeddedness of ELF in use.

In this chapter, I will provide an overview of the potential and the limitations of applying the concept of community of practice to empirical research into ELF. After briefly tracing the origins of the concept and its first applications in sociolinguistics, the three criterial dimensions of a community of practice – mutual engagement, its joint enterprise and a shared repertoire – will be described, including a discussion of critical issues that have been raised in relation to them. For each dimension, it will be shown, on the basis of existing research, how these have been realized in ELF-based communities of practice. After a brief consideration of research methodological implications, empirically derived insights into the socially embedded and dynamic nature of ELF-based shared repertoires will be summarized and discussed with regard to four exemplary facets of ELF communication (strategies, multilingualism, sociopragmatic hybridity and ELF speakers' identities). I conclude by reviewing the concept of community of practice in its capacities as an analytical tool, as a theoretical notion and as an educational model.

Communities of practice as an analytical research tool: origin and applications

Lave and Wenger (1991: 97–98) introduced the concept "community of practice" as part of their theory of situated learning, in which apprenticeship-like types of learning are conceptualized as "legitimate peripheral participation", but did not specify the term in detail. Its analytical potential for sociolinguistic research was recognized and explored by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992), who introduced it to language and gender research with the following, now classic definition:

> A community of practice is 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. As a social construct, a community of practice is different from the traditional community, primarily because it is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages.
>
> *(Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992: 464)*

The prominence Eckert and McConnell-Ginet give in their definition to emerging "ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations" as these aggregates' shared "practices", will be shown to prove particularly helpful in analysing the use of ELF as norm-driven,[2] social behaviour in group-based social contexts. Adopting a "midlevel category" (Wenger 1998: 124) such as the community of practice – as opposed to analytical categories describing larger and less cohesive configurations of speakers – to examine ELF in its social contexts helps to identify and describe group-internal social parameters and how these govern its members' linguistic and communicative behaviour.

Holmes and Meyerhoff (1999: 174) translate the idea of social learning into a sociolinguistic perspective:

> The process of becoming a member of a CofP – as when we join a new workplace, a book group, or a new family […] – involves learning. We learn to perform appropriately in a CofP as befits our membership status: initially as a 'peripheral member', later perhaps as a 'core member' […]. In other words, a CofP inevitably involves the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence.

Wenger, in his 1998 book, sets out to explore the concept of community of practice "more systematically" in order "to make it more useful as a thinking tool" (Wenger 1998: 7). Starting out from the fact that communities of practice are a familiar experience to everyone since "[w]e all belong to communities of practice. At home, at work, at school, in our hobbies" (Wenger 1998: 7) and from his observation that "the learning that is most personally transformative turns out to be the learning that involves membership in these communities of practice", he aims to exploit this familiarity to further elaborate his conception of learning as "social participation" (Wenger 1998: 4). Crucially, participation to him is both "a kind of action and a form of belonging" (Wenger 1998: 6).

To him, the concept of community of practice serves as a "point of entry" into his more encompassing theory of social learning (Wenger 1998: 8). A concise definition of the concept itself is not offered. Instead, three criterial dimensions of such communities are described: mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire (Wenger 1998: 72–85. 124–126). It is these criterial dimensions that help to specify what a community of practice is, in contrast to other non-practice based communities (or non-community forming types of practices).

Criterial dimensions of communities of practice

Communities of practice exist regardless of externally applied analytical categories. In other words, a group configuration is either a community of practice, or it is not. Two implications arise from this observation. First, configurations that do not ontologically represent a community of practice according to Wenger's criteria cannot be transformed into such merely for research purposes. This is a lesson that can be learnt from previous research in sociolinguistics, where, as Meyerhoff (2005: 597) notes, enthusiasm for Wenger's concept has gone slightly overboard in the past. "[S]imply jumping on a bandwagon and picking up a trendy new term [. . .] for analysing data it is not equipped to handle", she argues (Meyerhoff 2005: 597), is a rather unwise thing to do. Second, empirical work that does not explicitly apply the community of practice framework may nevertheless offer de facto portrayals of exactly such communities, their members and their shared repertoires. So, for instance, the work by Kankaanranta and her colleagues (e.g. Kankaanranta and Planken 2010) and Räisänen's longitudinal study (2013) represent examples of what could be categorized as conceptually 'covert' analyses of international business communities of practice or selected aspects thereof.

Mutual engagement

For a community of practice to evolve as a coherent group, its members need to interact on a regular basis. Importantly, while pursuing their tasks (or what they interpret these tasks to be) such interactions have to be made possible in the first place. The primary channel for such exchanges is direct face-to-face interaction, however, these days most likely complemented

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by electronically mediated communication. Just how much face-to-face contact between members is necessary for a community of practice to establish meaningful and rich relationships and to sustain itself as a community, is a highly controversial matter, and needs to be assessed carefully for each individual configuration. As a result of the participants' mutual engagement various kinds of relationships evolve, with the community's members being "included in what matters" (Wenger 1998: 74), albeit to varying degrees depending on the members' status as "core" or "peripheral" members (Wenger 1998: 7). Establishing such group coherence requires considerable investment on the part of its members (cf. Wenger 1998: 74). Most importantly, however, right from the outset, Wenger (1998: 77) argues against a romanticized view of communities of practice, making it quite clear that these are not places free of conflict and power issues. This is a point on which he has been criticized, wrongly, I would maintain, on several occasions (see e.g. Barton and Tusting 2005a; Hughes *et al.* 2007). The people who are brought together in different types of communities of practice can be very different in all kinds of ways including the ways in which they respond to whatever their 'joint enterprises' are: "The resulting relations reflect the full complexity of doing things together" (Wenger 1998: 77).

Therefore, interactions among members of a community of practice can be both "harmonious or conflictual" (Wenger 1998: 125). ELF-resourced communities of practice are no exception. It is this observation about the full range of possible interpersonal configurations that makes the concept a particularly valuable one for ELF research. It allows a contextually and situationally informed analysis of language use, reminding ELF scholars of the fact that ELF talk is not per se 'cooperative' in the sense of 'conflict-free'. In this regard, the community of practice framework, which requires an ethnographic and multi-dimensional research methodology, facilitates detailed sociolinguistic and sociopragmatic analyses of *when* and *how* ELF speakers in a given interactional sequence decide to co-operate or not to co-operate with each other.

Taking a look at research into ELF-based communities of practice available to date, what are the ways in which mutual engagement in such communities is enacted? Ehrenreich (2009, 2010, 2011a), Kankaanranta and Planken (2010), and Alharbi (2015) have identified the following forms of mutual engagement in the global workplace among business professionals, who, by the way, are always simultaneously members in several communities of practice: face-to-face encounters in offices, in meeting rooms, in hallways or at the coffee machine, over lunch and during business dinners. The encounters take place at home and abroad, with colleagues in subsidiaries or with clients. Naturally, mutual engagement among business professionals also involves phone calls, phone or video conferences (or net conferences) as well as e-mail. Group sizes and speaker configurations may vary considerably from one encounter to the next. In the domain of higher education, interactions and relationship building in a community of practice of Erasmus students occur in shared activities such as partying and travelling (Kalocsai 2014: 85–89), and in an international hotel management programme, inside and outside the classroom in various subgroups (Smit 2010). Crucially, the examples in all studies underline the fact that the concept of community of practice is not a synonym for externally defined groups or configurations of people (i.e. a classroom, a team, or a unit; see Wenger 1998: 74). A community of practice only evolves as a result of the relationships its members establish through their mutual engagement. The studies available so far also demonstrate that for some ELF speakers the communicative contexts in which they find themselves are relatively stable and fixed for the time of their community's existence, as is the case with the group of Erasmus students, and even more so with the students in the international hotel management programme. Yet, in other contexts, as can be

seen in the international business communities of practice (Ehrenreich 2009, 2010, 2011a; Alharbi 2015), the ELF speakers involved are simultaneously members, often in different roles (i.e. as core or peripheral members), of several parallel communities of practice, communities that might themselves be in a state of flux to a greater or lesser extent, forming and dissolving, acquiring new members and losing others.

Joint enterprise

The second criterial dimension of a community's shared practice is the negotiation of a joint enterprise. While this is a fairly intuitive notion in contexts such as Wenger's original research setting in an insurance company, in other domains this dimension may be more difficult to pin down. It is no surprise, then, that as a conceptual category, the notion of a joint enterprise seems to pose a considerable challenge when applied to sociolinguistic and ELF research. Two of the crucial questions in this regard are: First, is 'language' part of a given community's joint enterprise or not? (see Ehrenreich 2009) And, second, how specific does a community's joint enterprise have to be in order to be analytically meaningful? (see e.g. Meyerhoff 2002; Prior 2003; Davies 2005; and for Business English as a lingua franca ((B)ELF), see Ehrenreich 2009).

According to Wenger, a joint enterprise is the goal or purpose that motivates the participants' interrelated actions, as "their negotiated response to their situation" (Wenger 1998: 77). As a result, "relations of mutual accountability" are created, which serve as community-specific guidelines as to "what matters and what does not" (Wenger 1998: 81). Consequently, a negotiated joint enterprise is never a direct reflection of an official or external goal, but is transformed by the participants themselves in and through their practices to suit their own purposes as much as is possible in a given setting.

As indicated above, in the domain of business identifying the joint enterprise of a community of practice is a fairly straightforward issue. Companies are 'profit-making organizations', it is their goal to develop and sell whatever product or service they have specialized in. In their organizational structures, the respective departments (e.g. research and development, production, sales, IT) as well as the units and teams contribute to this aim. Within the departments and across them, company-internally and externally, with colleagues and with customers, members of management and employees form communities of practice, who jointly negotiate how this ultimate goal of 'profit-making' defines their everyday practices. Generally, 'language' or 'speaking a language' are not normally part of such joint enterprises (with the exception of, for example, communication departments and translating agencies). At the same time, this does not mean that language is not playing an important part in such non-language focussed communities' practices. Quite the contrary, the participants' mutual engagement and the negotiation of their respective joint enterprises are realized via language – in all its social and stylistic functions – and would, quite clearly, not be possible without it. However, for heuristic reasons, it is important not to conflate what is symptomatic of fundamental differences in the respective 'relevance systems', i.e. a community's set of priorities, of different professional or interest groups (for a brief discussion of the sociological construct of relevance systems and its implications for ELF research, see Ehrenreich 2009: 128–129).

As discussed in Ehrenreich (2009), language plays a pivotal role in the 'relevance systems' of 'language-focussed' people or professional groups such as linguists, language teachers and language students (Ehrenreich 2009: 128–129). For these groups, language, or more

specifically, in the case of English language specialists, English, is part and parcel of the joint enterprise of whatever professional community of practice (or related 'constellations of practice') they are a member of. With regard to 'content-focussed' people or professional groups, language only plays a secondary role. Content comes first, and language serves the purpose of conveying content (Ehrenreich 2009, 2010, 2011a). This conceptual distinction between language-focussed vs content-focussed speakers is helpful in more than one way. Most importantly, it helps to explain the markedly different attitudes towards ELF between different professional groups (Ehrenreich 2009).[3] Second, it helps to uncover a heuristic confusion in early attempts to apply the community of practice framework to ELF speakers generally. For example, it was suggested with regard to applying the community of practice framework to ELF that negotiation not only "on the content plane", but also "on the level of linguistic (English) forms" was part of the "'enterprise' in ELF talk" (House 2003: 572). Such a perspective may be justified in ELF-based communities of practice that carry a strong language focus such as EMI classes (for an example, see Smit 2010). Yet, in all other cases, English (as a lingua franca) is most probably part of a community's 'shared repertoire', not part of their 'joint enterprise'. Ultimately, however, whether and to what degree this conceptual distinction – language, or ELF, being part of a community's joint enterprise vs not being part of their shared enterprise – holds true for any given ELF-based community of practice needs to be examined carefully by the researcher. It is the researcher's task to reconstruct the participants' *emic* views on what they themselves consider to be or not to be components of their joint enterprises, and how these components relate to their shared repertoires.

The second challenge inherent in the notion of a community's 'joint enterprise' concerns its specificity. ELF scholars are well-advised to take note of the critical voices that have been raised in sociolinguistic research. For example, Meyerhoff (2002: 528) emphasizes that "[i]t is important that [the] shared enterprise be reasonably specific and not very general or abstract". And, extending her argument, that

> [i]t ought to contribute something meaningful to an understanding of the dynamics of the group involved. Sociolinguists who wish to use the notion of CofP in their analyses have to exercise caution and ensure that as researchers they are not attempting to constitute 'CofPs' for which a shared enterprise is explanatorily vacant.
>
> *(Meyerhoff 2002: 528)*

To illustrate her point from a sociolinguist's perspective, Meyerhoff presents an example taken from her own research that cannot be explained productively using the community of practice framework, simply because, as she states, "it was impossible to specify what kind of enterprise all the women who were observed using *sore* [a Vanuatu apology routine; SE] to express empathy might share" (Meyerhoff 2002: 530). Translating these words of caution into ELF research, this means that, hypothetically speaking, 'communicating via ELF' with no further defined shared goal would in most domains fall into the category of an 'explanatorily vacant' enterprise.

Specificity of a joint enterprise in the business domain is not a problem, and the same potentially holds for classrooms of various kinds and related programme activities. Yet, to what extent externally defined groups such as classrooms actually transform into communities of practice is a matter of the participants' actual mutual engagement. In other contexts, particularly with regard to "self-constituted groups" (Davies 2005: 562), it might be more difficult, in general, to uncover and define the possible joint enterprise of a given group configuration. For example, online communities or student groups do not automatically

constitute communities of practice. This is the case only if they have as a group negotiated a shared enterprise, at least for a given time span (see Davies 2005: 562).

Returning to the questions stated at the beginning of this section regarding 'language' as part of a community's joint enterprise and the specificity of such enterprises, how have these issues been dealt with in community-of-practice-based empirical ELF research to date? In my own study of two Germany-based multinational corporations in the technology sector, the members' enterprises arise from and revolve around the individuals' responsibilities, for example, in engineering or in sales, or around their organizations' structures, as well as, importantly, the fact that several years ago their jobs had taken on a global dimension (Ehrenreich 2009, 2010, 2011a). Their joint enterprises concern business issues. (B)ELF, from an emic view, is part of the communities' shared repertoires. As such it is, without any doubt, inextricably linked to business matters in that it serves the purpose of doing business, just like any other language or semiotic tool. In Alharbi's study in a British-owned health insurance company in Saudi Arabia, the employees' focus is on how to get their jobs in the multicultural teams of the company's IT department done in a meaningful way (Alharbi 2015). Despite the obvious contextual differences, her findings are very similar to mine, with the exception that in particular configurations and only for some members, in Alharbi's study, 'English' temporarily seems to surface as part of the members' 'enterprise'. In the educational domain, the situation seems to be slightly different. The group of Erasmus students in Kalocsai's (2014) study adapted the official rationale of the Erasmus programme in a dynamic manner, a gradual process resulting in the overall joint enterprise of building an Erasmus network of friends; an enterprise, which for some members at least, was associated with the language-related goal of improving their English (Kalocsai 2014: 77–85). In Smit's (2010: 106, 131, 135) analysis of an English-medium vocational programme, the students harmonized three components as their jointly negotiated enterprise: first, the educational goal; second, building relationships among themselves; and finally, improving their English language proficiency. Yet, in the overall account of the study, 'English as a classroom language' is on several occasions portrayed not only as the researcher's main focus, but also as the sole component of the community's enterprise, a view that may not be entirely compatible, and emically justified, with the students' nor the teachers' perspectives. There is content matter, too, and there are relational goals.

Shared repertoire

The third dimension of practice that contributes to creating coherence in a community is the development of a shared repertoire for negotiating meaning among its members (Wenger 1998: 82). The individual elements of this repertoire can be very heterogeneous in nature and comprise both linguistic and non-linguistic elements. Diverse as they may seem to outsiders, they are not random, but are unified by and a reflection of the members' joint enterprise:

> The repertoire of a community of practice includes routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres […], actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence, and which have become part of its practice […] It includes the discourse by which members create meaningful statements about the world, as well as the styles by which they express their forms of membership and their identities as members.
>
> *(Wenger 1998: 83)*

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When a community of practice evolves, its members bring with them a diverse set of communicative resources, which are then "imported, adopted, and adapted for their own purpose – if only the language(s) they speak" (Wenger 1998: 126). With regard to their analyses, ELF scholars need to be careful to acknowledge the fact that the shared repertoire of any ELF-based community of practice is always much more than 'just' ELF. From a community of practice perspective, ELF in its varied manifestations is part of and at the same time embedded as only one of many other elements in a multi-layered communicative repertoire; a repertoire that is itself inextricably linked with the community members' mutual engagement and their joint enterprise (Ehrenreich 2009; Kalocsai 2014: 95–98). Crucially, it is the community's joint enterprise, not any community-external criterion, which serves as the ultimate benchmark for appropriateness (Ehrenreich 2009). Moreover, such shared repertoires are not fixed at any given point in time, but mutable and adaptive (Wenger 1998: 83).[4] As evidenced in Ehrenreich (2009), Räisänen (2013), Alharbi (2015) and others, in business communities these repertoires comprise, in addition to English, several other languages as well as documents such as drawings, charts, power point presentations or websites, also often models of different parts of technical products, and, on a more abstract level, certain "ways of doing things" (Wenger 1998: 83). In Kalocsai's (2014) Erasmus student community the repertoire includes, in addition to languages, collaboratively built 'schemata' for partying and travelling, conversational frames, humour and communicational support. The focus in Smit's (2010) analysis of an EMI setting is on classroom interaction via ELF as the hotel management students' and their teachers' shared repertoire.

Wenger also points out two additional implications of such repertoires being dynamic and interactive, which provide instructive analytical clues for any socially situated research into ELF:

> Agreement in the sense of literally shared meaning is not a precondition for mutual engagement in practice, nor is it its outcome. Indeed, mismatched interpretations or misunderstandings need to be addressed and resolved directly only when they interfere with mutual engagement [or the joint enterprise; SE]. Even then, they are not merely problems to resolve, but occasions for the production of new meanings.
>
> *(Wenger 1998: 84)*

Without doubt, ambiguity, in terms of linguacultural ambiguity, potentially extending to every aspect of ELF communication, is one of its key characteristics. In ELF-based communities of practice, tolerance for ambiguity is needed, assessed against the requirements of mutual engagement and the joint enterprise.

Wenger's characterization of the shared repertoire of a community of practice, is, indeed, relatively brief, as has been noted by several sociolinguists (e.g. Tusting 2005). Yet, given the overall goal of his book, this is not necessarily a major conceptual weakness of his theory per se. Concise as his outline of the characteristics of a shared repertoire may be, seen in conjunction with the other two dimensions, mutual engagement and joint enterprise, it provides sufficient orientation for sociolinguists, including ELF scholars, to develop and utilize the notion to support their research in terms of socially situated analyses of language, or ELF, in use.

Summing up: features of a community of practice and methodological implications

Aware of the challenge the expository nature of his characterization of the concept of community of practice poses – with no concise definition included (see Barton and

Tusting 2005b: 6) – Wenger (1998: 125–126) offers as an additional heuristic device the following list of features, which indicate whether and to what degree a community of practice has formed:

1   sustained mutual relationships—harmonious or conflictual
2   shared ways of engaging in doing things together
3   the rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation
4   absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were merely the continuation of an ongoing process
5   very quick setup of a problem to be discussed
6   substantial overlap in participants' descriptions of who belongs
7   knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to an enterprise
8   mutually defining identities
9   the ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products
10 specific tools, representations, and other artifacts
11 local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter
12 jargon and shortcuts to communication as well as the ease of producing new ones
13 certain styles recognized as displaying membership
14 a shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the world.

Incidentally, a close look at these features reveals again the pivotal role language plays in the shared practices of such communities.

Adequate research techniques are required to examine the social facets of ELF use in communities of practice from an emic, i.e. the participants', perspective. As a general rule, qualitative ethnographic approaches, ideally in conjunction with various conversation or discourse analytic methods, seem to be the most promising way to capture the multidimensional realities of ELF use in such communities as perceived by their members. The studies conducted to date have used, in various combinations, the following data collection techniques: (participant) observation, qualitative interviews, casual conversations, online journals, as well as audio recordings of speech data. Moreover, as challenging as it may seem, spending an extended period of time in the field is a methodological *sine qua non*. Finally, novice researchers need to be aware of the fact that a distinct set of criteria has been developed to assess the overall quality of qualitative research (see Smit 2010: 87–88).

The shared repertoires of ELF-based communities of practice: socially embedded and dynamic

Seidlhofer was right when, some 10 years ago, she issued her call for "clearly situated qualitative studies with a strong ethnographic element" (Seidlhofer *et al.* 2006: 21). Looking at the findings of community-of-practice-based research into the use of (B)ELF available to date, these findings demonstrate conclusively what can be gained by such a 'qualitative turn' (see Ehrenreich 2009; Kankaanranta and Planken 2010; Smit 2010; Räisänen 2013; Kalocsai 2014; Alharbi 2015). Summarizing their overall contribution to (B)ELF research, these studies are highly innovative in that they make 'the social' visible in (B)ELF, thus restoring its full communicative complexity as 'language in its social context'; an aspect that had previously, hence Seidlhofer's call, been neglected in ELF research.[5] Thick ethnographic descriptions of how (B)ELF is used in context, recorded from multiple angles and including longitudinal perspectives, reveal the wealth of social, often domain-specific, parameters at work in (B)ELF communication and how these

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govern the use of individual linguistic and communicative elements. These parameters include, to name but a few, issues of power and how power is defined in a given context, relating to hierarchies with regard to speakers, languages, cultures and organizations, as well as face issues and issues relating to social distance (see Ehrenreich 2011a). They also include domain-specific parameters, for example, with regard to business communication or classroom discourse, parameters that are derived from multiple, and often, but not necessarily, competing cultural norms. Rarely are these parameters stable ones, more often they are in flux and under ongoing negotiation in the respective communities of practice.

In terms of the overall qualities of (B)ELF identified so far, community-of-practice-based work generally supports previously gained insights into ELF in many ways. Crucially, what it offers on top of that are contextually sensitive analyses from multiple perspectives of individual aspects of ELF communication, analyses that eventually contribute to a more socially differentiated description of ELF. In their light, several generalizations concerning the nature of ELF may turn out to be somewhat premature and empirically not always fully justified. Similarly, empirically uncharted territory and several blind spots become visible. A few examples will help to illustrate these more general observations, examples referring to the use of communicative strategies, the multilingual nature of ELF, the role of cultural communicative conventions, as well as, finally, (B)ELF speakers' identities.

Communicative strategies have been studied extensively in ELF research and they are generally regarded as an indication of the cooperative (in a somewhat narrow sense of the word) nature of ELF communication. Often these strategies are mentioned as candidates for possible pedagogical implications. Yet, through community-of-practice-based studies we gain a clearer picture of the social complexity that governs speakers' decisions as to what strategy is appropriate to use in a given context or not. Quite clearly, in the business domain, power issues can occasionally override short-term communicative needs or result in uncooperative behaviour (Ehrenreich 2010; Alharbi 2015). In contrast, "collaborative communication work" (Smit 2010: 404) has been found to eclipse typical asymmetries in classroom talk in Smit's analysis in the domain of higher education.

Similarly, with regard to the notion of ELF as a multilingual resource detailed analyses of specific contexts highlight huge differences in terms of the degree to which multilingualism is played out in ELF-based encounters. In some settings, there may be a happy mix of various languages surfacing in addition to, or as part of, ELF (e.g. Kalocsai 2014: 158–163; Ehrenreich 2016: 146–149), while in others the minimum three languages involved, i.e. two L1s plus English, are strictly confined to their respective communicative spaces. For example, this was the case in a somewhat hostile encounter between German and Chinese business professionals during a meeting I observed, in which the two first languages of the participants were used extensively within the L1 groups, but in a conversationally highly impolite way, i.e. without explaining their L1 use in any way to the other party. Two parameters that contributed to the observed conversational climate include power and social distance. The observed meeting involved an important, but relatively new client (the Chinese party), and was thus an example of company-external communication, which is generally said to be considerably more formal than company-internal communication. With regard to code-switching, one of the most obvious instantiations of ELF as a multilingual resource, Alharbi (2015: 150) is able to show, on the basis of her multi-method ethnographic data, how the instances of code-switching in company-internal meetings in a Saudi MNC varied according to the number of non-Arabic speaking, English native speaker seniors present in such meetings. In Smit's study (2010) of an EMI setting, other languages than English were by and large considered by the community members not to be a particularly positive resource.

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At the linguacultural interface of ELF communication (see Baker, Chapter 2 this volume), we find a lot of empirically uncharted territory. Pragmatic hybridity in terms of interculturally mixed communicative conventions has been found to be a key characteristic of ELF communication (Louhiala-Salminen *et al.* 2005; Ehrenreich 2009, 2010, 2015). Ethnographic insights into the practices of international business communities of practice highlight, from an emic point of view, how such linguacultural 'leakage' (see for this term, Jenkins 2015: 75) is dealt with. Sometimes, although often only initially, this mix of communicative conventions poses a challenge. Members of a community of practice negotiate strategies to deal with these differences, often by way of integrating them into their shared repertoires. A host of questions needs to be asked: How do such interculturally mixed repertoires develop? Which parameters are most influential in shaping them? Power issues, local cultures (i.e. the 'habitat factor'), the dominance of same-language-speaker groups? When or why is the mix of different communicative conventions experienced as a challenge? What are the factors contributing to a successful or less successful handling of such a mix? Once a community has negotiated an interculturally hybrid repertoire of communicative conventions, is this repertoire relatively stable or rather dynamic? Which parameters govern its situational realization? And finally, are such processes mono-directional (e.g. moving towards Western cultures?) or multidirectional? Most of these issues have only rarely been explored empirically so far,[6] not least because they pose considerable methodological challenges. Community-of-practice-based, qualitative approaches offer promising avenues in this respect.

Finally, there is a great overlap in terms of how community-of-practice-based research describes how members of (B)ELF-resourced communities of practice develop, over time and through their mutual engagement around a joint enterprise, into confident users-cum-learners of (B)ELF (Ehrenreich 2009, 2010; Kankaanranta and Planken 2010; Räisänen 2013; Kalocsai 2014). They seem to follow a shared "trajectory" (Räisänen 2013), in that they start out from an EFL (English as a foreign language) learner identity with a deeply ingrained deficiency orientation. Gradually, however, through a process of secondary socialization, they grow into competent and confident users of their respective shared repertoires. These do not only comprise (B)ELF and other languages, but many additional enterprise-related communicative and semiotic elements. Eventually, (B)ELF is embraced as 'theirs' (see also Kalocsai 2014).[7] In the light of these findings, the often quoted distinction between 'language(s) for communication' versus 'language(s) for identification' has become obsolete (see House 2003 with reference to Hüllen 1992). (B)ELF is much more than just a language for communication. For many speakers it clearly also serves a range of identificatory purposes in their global interactional spaces. Evidently, communicating extensively via ELF within, across and beyond their communities of practice results in a type of learning that is "most personally transformative" (Wenger 1998: 6). Yet, interestingly, in ELF settings *within* an institutional educational context, such emancipation from one's 'old' EFL language learner identity is not reported (Smit 2010: 408).

Conclusion

Community-of-practice-based empirical explorations of (B)ELF are still rare. Yet, as has been shown in this chapter, individually and in their entirety, they yield invaluable insights into (B)ELF as a social language, and clearly, more work along these lines needs to be done. By comparing and contrasting the shared repertoires of different communities of practice – either within the same organizational or institutional settings, or across such settings, within

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or across different domains, and in different geographical regions – it might eventually be possible to distinguish community-specific from more generally applicable social param- eters governing the use of ELF in context. At the same time, as a research tool, the concept of community of practice is not a methodological "be-all and end-all" (see Meyerhoff 2005: 597). Groups that are organized in different ways regarding their internal structure or their goal-orientation require different concepts. Therefore, additional conceptual tools are needed in the ELF research tool box to capture adequately the specific social dimensions of ELF use in a wide range of various groupings of speakers, including larger configurations of ELF speakers as well as more transient or one-off encounters between ELF-speaking indi- viduals. Developing such tools is high on the agenda for future ELF research (see, for example, Jenkins 2015: 76–77, on the notion of Pratt's (1991) 'contact zones').

With regard to ELF theorizing, the discussion in this chapter underlines the fact that the community of practice as a concept is not an adequate replacement for the sociolinguistic concept of the 'speech community'. The search for alternatives is still on. Yet, while the com- munity of practice itself is not a suitable candidate, additional research based on the concept might substantiate the observation that in certain "constellations of practice" (Wenger 1998: 126–131) or even beyond these, speakers of (B)ELF, in fact, share very similar beliefs as to the appropriate use of language as part of their repertoires. What is more, looking at the find- ings available to date, there is already valuable empirical evidence indicating that these shared beliefs result in very similar speaker identifications and, indeed, a shared sense of membership. So maybe, after all, rather than looking for conceptual alternatives, it might suffice to recast the concept of speech community in global terms. Similarly to Mauranen's notion of 'second order language contact' (see Mauranen, Chapter 1 this volume), ELF speakers globally could be seen as members of 'second order global speech communities', of which they have become members through a shared process of secondary socialization. This process takes place in their respective domains, e.g. business, academia, higher education, leisure, etc., where they are socialized into the appropriate uses of English as a multilingual and multicultural lingua franca.

Finally, the potential of the concept of community of practice in its educational dimension[8] is still waiting to be discovered and explored in ELF as a field of enquiry. In some settings, such a community of practice approach might prove to be the key to a more contextually refined approach to fostering the users-cum-learners' competence of ELF in its fluid and hybrid nature, e.g. in business. In other settings, it remains to be seen to what extent commu- nities of practice can be 'cultivated' (see Wenger *et al.* 2002) in ways that support – through mutual engagement and organized around a joint enterprise – the development of sociolin- guistic competence in ELF. To conclude, ultimately, as is the intention of Wenger's theory, the concept of community of practice in all its dimensions – in theorizing, in research and in education – invites us to think about adequate conceptions of learning, including the learning of ELF as a social language.

Notes

1 As an interesting precursor of Wenger's concept, but already with specific reference to English as a lingua franca, see Knapp's notion of 'participation communities' (Knapp 1984/2015).
2 Norm here refers to communicative norms in the broadest and most comprehensive sense of the term.
3 See as an interesting example illustrating the positive attitudes towards BELF the following resource from the field of Business English teaching (Handford 2016): https://medium.com/business-english/ business-english-as-a-lingua-franca-belf-ff52ebd05a66#.atiwdo9p0 (accessed 20 May 2016).
4 Which, incidentally, is one of the main reasons why teasing out pedagogical implications of community-of-practice-informed (B)ELF research for teaching purposes poses such a great

challenge, at least if such 'teaching' is not at the same time accompanied by a major philosophical reorganization of its educational framework.

5   Interestingly, research into BELF has always included a strong qualitative element. In fact, Louhiala-Salminen's (2002) seminal study can be classified as another conceptually 'covert' community-of-practice-based study.

6   But see Ehrenreich 2011b for a discussion of the interculturally mixed uses of address terms in a German MNC and the varied parameters influencing their situational realization.

7   See again the resource from the field of Business English teaching (Handford 2016).

8   See also the paragraph on 'Education' in the section 'Where is the concept being applied?' on Wenger's website at http://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/ (accessed 20 May 2016).

Related chapters in this handbook

1   Mauranen, Conceptualising ELF

2   Baker, English as a lingua franca and intercultural communication.

25 Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen, 'ELF in the domain of business – BELF: What does the B stand for?

47 Jenkins, The future of English as a lingua franca?

Further reading

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