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English as a Lingua Franca. Plurilingual Repertoires and Language Choices in Computer-Mediated Communication

Abstract:
This paper focuses on ELF use in computer-mediated-communication, and specifically on language choice and on the exploitation of the users’ plurilingual repertoires as a communicative strategy in Web 2.0 social spaces. Through data drawn from personal blogs and fan fiction texts, it will be exemplified how adapting English to ELF contexts and engaging in language alternation practices such as code-switching and polylingual languaging or heteroglossia may relate to audience design strategies in these online spaces.

Introduction

In the contemporary, global society, international communication among people from different linguacultural backgrounds has become a common, if not daily, occurrence. As transportation and mass communication technology developed over the second half of the twentieth century, distances have shrunk considerably; geographical borders have stretched and collapsed, allowing for the free movement of flows of goods, people and data. High international mobility has given rise to the need for a language of global communication, which is de facto played by English in its lingua franca role.

ELF has been extensively studied in relation to a number of face-to-face professional, academic and personal communication contexts, where speakers involved in ELF communication make use of a variety of linguistic and pragmatic accommodation strategies in order to carry out successful interactions that lead to the achievement of their communicative goals. However, the pervasiveness of English has crossed over to the digital world, where international users from different linguacultural backgrounds meet in virtual spaces and share information and content most often via ELF. Computer-mediated communication, (henceforth
CMC) is a product of those same globalization processes that have fostered international mobility and communication as well as the need for a common LF. Despite being different phenomena, CMC and ELF have many intersection points, as will be seen, both being involved in cross-cultural communication across traditional boundaries and communities, and in the establishment of virtual communities and networks that are no longer geographically but interest-based, involving either professional or personal interests. ELF is indeed employed as a language of cross-cultural communication in international online spaces as part of its users’ linguistic repertoires. Plurilingual users often navigate the multilingual web selecting which elements of their linguistic repertoires to use according to context and aims. Indeed, the self-presentational (Lee, 2014) nature of social network sites (SNS) and other Web 2.0 spaces is such that users adopt different linguistic behaviors, including language choice, when they communicate on an international level with different types and categories of users.

In this paper, after outlining characteristic traits of ELF and CMC, we will be looking more specifically at how linguistic behavior such as language choice and code-switching on social network sites (henceforth SNS) is employed by users of Web 2.0 social spaces in relation to audience design (Tagg and Seargeant, 2014), and how the insertion of culturally-loaded elements from other languages into ELF talk is managed in relation to international audiences. Specifically, we will focus on the users’ exploitation of their sociolinguistic repertoires in data from the content-sharing social platform Fanfiction.net (henceforth FF.net) and the blogging platform LiveJournal.com (henceforth LJ) and on the way participants employ English in its lingua franca role to position themselves as global internet users and include elements of their local culture in their use of English. Exemplifications of data drawn from two larger research projects and qualitative studies related respectively to fan fiction (Franceschi, 2014) and personal blogging (Vettorel, 2014) will be provided.

1. English and CMC

From its advent, the use of the Internet has grown exponentially, as computer and mass communication technologies have developed and become easily accessible to the general public over the years (Crystal, 2006). Looking at figures, the extent and the speed of this growth becomes apparent: in 1995, less than twenty years ago, the percentage of the world population connected to the Internet was a meager 0.4%. Fifteen
years later, in 2010, the figure had risen to a 28.7%, and the most recent estimates, referring to March 2014, put the percentage at 40.7%, which translates into 2,937 million Internet users in the world today. Although English remains to this day the most represented language online, statistics show that its hegemony is slowly being eroded by other languages, with emerging economies such as China, Brazil and a number of Arab-speaking countries increasing their presence online. For example, in the 2000-2011 period, the presence of English increased of the 301.4%, Chinese of 1478.7%, and Portuguese of 990.1%. Nevertheless, given its role as a language of international communication, English online sets itself apart from other increasingly represented languages: indeed, English is not used exclusively by (and among) its native speakers, but acts as a lingua franca for internet users connecting from all over the world. The use of English for cross-cultural communication goes hand in hand with a reduction of traditional spatial boundaries, which has fostered higher mobility and migration fluxes, as well as CMC in virtual environments (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999; Pennycook, 2012; Blommaert and Backus, 2013).

As Mauranen recently states, «we can without hesitation place ELF among one of the most important social phenomena that operate on a global scale; it is on a par with things like global economy, mobility, and the Internet, and closely intertwined with them» (Mauranen, 2012: 17). On the one hand, CMC has contributed to the acceleration of the spread of English as a commonly shared code of communication, while on the other hand it has fostered the use, adaptation and appropriation of English as a Lingua Franca by non-native speakers of English; in addition, English itself is employed together with other languages (and semiotic codes) to communicate across traditional territorial and community boundaries, as will be seen.

ELF, by its definition, «is not a variety of English but a variable way of using it» (Seidlhofer, 2011: 7); it is therefore not retraceable to a monolithic English, or a self-contained language system. It is, on the other hand, dynamic, fluid, and adaptable according to the needs of the communicative situation and participants. This protean ability of ELF fits well in international CMC contexts: language online is adapted to the multiple CMC modes and their specific characteristics, as well as to the communicative needs and aims of online users, individual, and constellations of participants (Vettorel, 2014), with ELF coming into play especially where globalized/ing and localized/ing factors entwine (Androutsopoulos, 2010).

The use of English as a language of international communication in CMC may be ascribed to a translocal view of digital communication.
Translocality «denotes a specific understanding of culture, where culture is seen as outward-looking, exogenous, focused on hybridity, translation, and identification» (Leppänen et al., 2009: 1082), and it refers to the shift from a human experience that is primarily geographically and ethnically-based, to increasingly mobile and virtual contexts of interaction. CMC and ELF can both be associated to the concept of translocality, where cross-cultural interactions occur within a de-territorialized global context. In terms of linguistic behavior, translocality online may be related to users who «find it a motivated and meaningful option to draw on resources provided by more than one language» (Leppänen, 2012: 233) in addition to ELF as a shared resource for communication. Internet users make use of their linguistic repertoires in a variety of ways while engaging in online communication: they may employ multiple codes in a single contexts, using them one at a time (e.g. Barton and Lee, 2013; Chen 2013) or mixing them together, both as code-switching between two languages, (Lam, 2000, 2004) or through the exploitation of plurilingual resources (e.g. Leppänen et al., 2009) in languaging (Jørgensen, 2008) and heteroglossic (Leppänen, 2012) practices. Translocality is only one of the multiple features that ELF and CMC can be said to have in common: both show a high degree of hybridity, fragmentation and fluidity (Seidlhofer, 2011: 73); uses of non-normative, or innovative language features frequently emerging from both contexts mainly respond to pragmatic and social needs (Androutsopoulos, 2010, 2013; Seidlhofer, 2011; Mauranen, 2012; Hülmbauer, 2013; Cogo, 2012). As Baym (2010) remarks: «any instance of digital language use depends on the technology, the purpose of the interaction, the norms of the group, the communication style of the speakers’ social groups off-line, and the idiosyncrasies of individuals» (Baym, 2010: 65). The same concept is highlighted more recently by Barton and Lee, who state that «regular similarities and differences occur within and beyond one single mode of CMC; on the other hand, in reality, users do not apply the same set of CMC features to all contexts; but they constantly re-appropriate their ways of writing in different modes of CMC to suit different purposes» (Barton and Lee, 2013: 6). This is reminiscent of the fluid and ever-changing characteristics of ELF communication, where meaning is constantly negotiated on-line, and the language tweaked and adapted according to the context of the interaction, as well as to the needs and goals of its speakers. In CMC hybridity and non-standardness coexist with innovative language forms allegedly created to localizing aims; as in ELF, this is often realised drawing on the users’ plurilingualism and exploiting
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2. Audience in online social spaces

ELF users skilfully draw on their plurilingual (and semiotic) repertoires also on Web 2.0 CMC environments, that is, online platform that allow users to publish and circulate their own content online (cf. Barton and Lee, 2013: 9); the participants’ L1s and other LNs are often employed within heteroglossic and translingual practices according to the constellations and linguacultural identity participants wish to affiliate to.

At the turn of the millennium, the way people connected online underwent a shift from what is known as Web 1.0 to what is called Web 2.0. As Seargeant and Tagg explain, this shift «saw an explosion in online interactivity and user participation. The web was no longer a place where you went predominantly to consume content and information» (Seargeant and Tagg, 2014: 2). On the contrary, «Web 2.0 users increasingly regard the internet as a social space, where one can meet new people, hang out with friends and pursue all kinds of leisure activities» (Eisenlauer, 2013: 1), in networking practices among people who share professional and/or personal interests, often giving life to virtual Communities of Practice, or «constellations of interconnected practices» (Wenger, 1998; Hülmbauer, 2009; Seidlhofer, 2011). Such activities are carried out in multiple and varied online spaces that allow users to socialize as well create and circulate content sharing. These interactionally-oriented spaces are known as social media, which have been defined as «a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content» (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010: 61). As Boyd and Ellison (2007) remark, there are three main elements that characterize social network sites: «a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system», «a list of other users with whom they share a connection» and the possibility to «view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system» (Boyd and Ellison, 2007: 211).

One very important element in these environments, where users participate actively and create their own content, relates to how the presentation of the self is carried out; language choice is one of the means through which this can be done. The language, the variety and the register used in SNS may vary according to a number of criteria, mainly the target audience and the
topic discussed. As stated by Barton and Lee (2013: 55-56): «online users know very well how to deploy their linguistic resources in different contexts for different purposes and to different people», including the choice of a language (L1, Ln), together with English in its shared lingua franca role.

With the exclusion of certain CMC modes, such as instant messaging, where users communicate with specific, selected people, or forums where the rules of communication may be set by the forum moderator or owner, in most Web 2.0 spaces users can choose to formulate their contributes according to the intended, imagined or target audience. As mentioned, when users engage in SNSs, where interlocutors are not addressed face-to-face, an idea of the audience is constructed and then imagined into being «for the purpose of giving context to one’s utterances» (Tagg and Seargeant, 2014: 180). Barton and Lee (2013: 56) have identified three primary groups of target audience in Web 2.0 environments: «the general ‘unknown’ audience on the web (especially on Flickr and YouTube); ‘friends’ who are listed as contacts (especially on Flickr and Facebook), and friends in ‘real’ life (especially on instant messaging»). Along the same lines, the audience design strategies identified by Tagg and Seargeant, (direct address, for example tagging or creation of smaller groups; other structural affordances, such as separate posts; style and language choice; content, 2014: 167) «are crucial for SNS users as they seek to target individuals and communities from within the wider audience» (ivi: 161; cf. also Puschmann, 2009, 2013 for blogs). In multilingual environments such as SNSs, as described earlier, language choice becomes thus one of the main factors in terms of discriminating among audience groups. Language choice is one of the contributing elements in the management of self-presentation online, and the decision to post content or hypermedia links in a specific language is related to both positioning of the self and audience design, which are in turn connected\textsuperscript{3}. The following sections will examine how language choices are enacted drawing upon the plurilingual repertoires of CMC users communicating internationally in two main datasets, fan fiction writing and personal blogging.

3. Data collection: LiveJournal and Fanfiction.net

The two platforms from which data are drawn in this paper, FEnet and LJ, are social spaces that are not traditionally ascribable to the narrower definition of social network sites as «Social Software-based Websites whose primary aim is establishing and maintaining online communities by
asking participants to present themselves (in the form of public or semi-public profiles) and to connect and communicate with other participants» (Eisenlauer, 2013: 21, italics in original); nevertheless, they fulfill the aforementioned criteria proposed by Boyd and Ellison (2007) and are thus conceivable as strongly Web 2.0 social spaces. On FF.net, users that are fan of popular media texts may publish and circulate user-created narrative texts or poems inspired by their favorite original texts. The affordances of the website have, over the years, provided users with increasingly social opportunities: in addition to a profile page for each author, and a comment section for reader reviews and comments, the site allows users to create and participate in communities for fan and writers. A corpus of English-language fan fiction by NNS was compiled from FF.net, comprising the work of 26 writers representing 11 different native languages, for a total of about 250,000 words. A parallel, much smaller corpus of reader comments and reviews was also analyzed in order to explore the relationship between writers and readers. Due to the nature of the study, the collected data was analyzed from a qualitative perspective.

Weblogs have a strong social element to them as well: while blogging can be seen as a more monologically-oriented CMC mode, the comment sections allow readers to post remarks, at times prompting multi-party discussions among users. In addition, bloggers have a profile page where they list information about themselves, their interests and hobbies, or where they may link to their accounts on other websites and social spaces (Herring et al., 2006). Furthermore, the blogging platform LJ, from which the data mentioned here was collected, has a strong communitarian element to it, also thanks to the possibility to create public or limited-access community blogs, where multiple bloggers can post and leave comments. The corpus comprises data from 15 personal blogs by Italian bloggers communicating internationally, totaling about 312,300 words. Although English constitutes the main lingua franca of communication, languages from the interactants’ plurilingual repertoires, as will be seen, are widely present in the data.

4. Language choice in ELF online social spaces

As outlined in the previous sections, the Internet is inherently multilingual. In Web 2.0 spaces, users share content with multiple people and may make use of their plurilingual repertoires within the same space, according to their needs and to the audience they are targeting. Predictably,
English in its ELF realization is the go-to language in the first scenario theorized by Barton and Lee, when the audience is unknown, since it is likely to reach a wider public than other languages (Barton and Lee, 2013: 57; cf. also Tagg and Seargeant, 2014: 182). Indeed, non-native respondents from multiple studies have underlined the importance of English as the gateway to international audiences. For instance, Leppänen et al.’s Finnish informants, fan fiction writers, remarked that «writing in English is of course sometimes motivated by a wish to reach bigger audiences than the local Finnish ones» (Leppänen et al., 2009: 1090). Similarly, Barton and Lee’s informants on Flickr, agreed that «that English is the ‘universal’ language, which they would use to communicate with people who do not speak their local languages (Barton and Lee, 2013: 56). Bloggers in Vettorel’s study similarly stated they used English in order to address their international audience (Vettorel, 2014). In personal correspondence with some of the non-native fan fiction authors in Franceschi’s study (2014), an interest to share their content with a global audience emerged as the main reason for writing in English as well.

At the same time, most ELF users online do not use English exclusively, but employ their L1 and other LNs according to their communicative needs, the elements of their identity they want to project and the audience they want to address, and «[t]his audience cannot be conceived of as a single, one-rounded concept, but should rather be conceptualized as multidimensional» (Vettorel 2014: 63). Users may include (or possibly exclude) individual or multiple users in their posts simply by selecting one language over the other. For example, Chen’s empirical study (2013), based on Facebook, shows how language use in two comparable situations may vary substantially according to the respondents’ personal attitude and to the audience they target through their language choice. The subjects, two Chinese young women living in the United States as international students, displayed opposite behavior in their language choice on Facebook. One student wrote 68% of her posts in Mandarin, her L1, whereas the other student’s use of English involved 99% of her activity on Facebook, «position[ing] herself as an international English user» (Chen, 2013: 154). Language choice was related to audience perception and design: the first respondent posted culturally-loaded content to her Chinese readers, whereas the second one intended her posts to reach all her international English-speaking friends.

Linguistic behavior online linked to audience design does not involve exclusively the choice of one language, but it includes a range of language alternation phenomena such as code-switching, polylingual languaging (Jørgensen, 2008: 169) and heteroglossia (Leppänen, 2012). Through the
use of these strategies, users exploit their linguistic repertoires for meaning-making and social purposes (Leppänen, 2012: 236). In these cases, alternation may not entail long stretches of language, but the insertion of single words, discourse markers, fixed phrases and social formulas within the main language of communication. In contexts of high language contact such as CMC, these practices are not uncommon (Leppänen et al., 2009; Leppänen, 2012; Androutsopoulos, 2010, 2013). Such strategies have also been observed in ELF in offline contexts (Pölzl, 2003; Klimpfinger, 2007, 2009; Seidlhofer, 2011; Cogo, 2012; Motschenbacher, 2013), and, more recently, online environments, too (Lee, 2014; Barton and Lee, 2013; Lee and Barton, 2012; in relation to ELF Vettorel, 2014; Franceschi, 2014).

Resorting to languages other than English and code switching may be realized in the interactants’ L1 or in other languages that are part of these ELF users’ plurilingual repertoires (e.g. Hülmbauer, 2007, 2009, 2013; Cogo, 2009, 2011, 2012); generally the participants’ L1 is employed in connection to concepts related their primary linguaculture, while other LNs are generally related to (globally-set) interest-based topics the participants share in these ‘constellations of interconnected practices’.

4.1 Plurilingual repertoires

One of the most characterizing features of ELF is its protean form, in that it is often tweaked and adapted by speakers to fit the communicative needs of specific situations; English native norms are frequently flouted and innovative forms created in a given interaction; sometimes, it may even be more effective to employ a non-normative, innovative form, or introduce elements from a different language, especially when local elements are being shared with an international audience (e.g. Hülmbauer, 2013; Seidlhofer, 2011). This may be done also by drawing on the users’ plurilingual repertoires, as shown for example in Vettorel’s personal blog data, through borrowings or linguistic forms influenced by the participants’ L1, or by any Ln that is deemed relevant in a specific interest-based constellation (Vettorel, 2014: Chapter 6).

In fan fiction, Japanese and English elements are sometimes mixed together to increase understanding. One of the writers in Franceschi’s dataset, for instance, created a mixed compound, ‘megane-boy’, meaning ‘a boy with glasses’. «The word megane alone can be used to refer to a person with glasses, but the compound form - also as separate words - is also found in manga-related group» (Franceschi, 2014: 186). The seemingly redundant ‘boy’ may have been used to clarify that megane is not employed
in its meaning of ‘glasses’ but in reference to a person.

On the other hand, as documented in several online environments, English is generally perceived as the lingua franca allowing comprehensibility to an internationally-oriented audience. For example, several among Barton and Lee’s informants (2013) use, and at times state they use, English alongside other languages to share local cultures with a broader audience. In interviews with Facebook users, one of Sangiamchit’s non-native speakers of English informants mentions the necessity to adjust his linguistic behavior in order to make his messages fully understandable by his readers: «Using English online makes me aware to select a proper words or abbreviation. For example, I always use “hahaha” rather than “555” because my friends from different countries don’t know it means laughing in Thai» (Sangiamchit, 2013, emphasis in original).

Other times, as in Poppi’s study (2013) on corporate websites, linguistic strategies that have been associated with ELF, such as rephrasing and explaining (e.g. Mauranen, 2012), may be adopted in order to make content more appealing to the target audience. Including local terms and concepts rather than generic normative English ones may also contribute to clarifying content for the readers. As Poppi reiterates, in ELF contexts effective communication is not exclusively dependent on linguistic accuracy or native-like use of English. In Kankaanranta and Lohuiala-Salminen’s words «a grammatically and lexically ‘correct’ message doesn’t necessarily do the job, but a message with many mistakes may do so» (Kankaanranta and Lohuiala-Salminen, 2007: 56).

To sum up, the exploitation of the plurilingual repertoires in CMC-related modes appears to be a frequent practice, that is carried out to different aims according to the participants, the intended audience, as well as the characteristics of the mode itself.

### 4.2 Code-switching

Code-switching in ELF does not involve exclusively the speaker’s L1, but also other languages in which the speakers may be more or less proficient, resulting in polylingual languaging practices. As Jørgensen puts forward, «the use of languages of which the speaker knows only very little is more common in late modern urban societies» (2008: 168). Elements from multiple languages may also be used at the same time (Blommaert and Rampton, 2012; Jørgensen, 2008). Indeed, globalization has increased the contexts and occasions for language contact, and expressions and words from other languages have seeped into the linguistic repertoires of speakers, drawn
from «recreational, artistic and/or oppositional contexts» (Blommaert and Rampton, 2012: 7) that may be related to the specificities of (lingua)cultural elements, and/or «ethnic groups, new media and pop culture» (Franceschi, 2014: 136). As will be seen in the following sections, code-switching practices in our data are enacted in different ways to several functions, from signaling primary linguacultures to interest-based affiliations.

4.2.1 Primary Culture

Introducing elements of the speaker’s L1 into ELF as the primary language of communication is not uncommon in our data, as it is often through these elements that users project their linguacultural background out to other members of these spaces. Code-switching (henceforth CS), as well as translation and the exploitation of plurilingual repertoires are recurrent practices both in Vettorel’s personal blog data (Vettorel, 2014) and Franceschi’s fan fiction texts and reviews (2014), where three out of the four main functions identified for CS in ELF, that is, to specify an addressee, to introduce another idea, to signal culture (Klimpfinger, 2007, 2009) are realized⁴. As we have seen, overall, English is clearly employed by the participants to address a wider audience in its lingua franca role allowing internationally-based communication; furthermore, even code-switches, or aspects related to a more localized culture, are in the great majority of cases expressed also in English, in order to accommodate to the bloggers’ international audience. At times language alternation is even more directly related to audience design; a language switch involving long strings of non-formulaic language, for example, points to a choice to address a specific audience, that is, a more localized one, often consisting of speakers of the user’s L1. This may be seen, for example, in the profile pages in FF.net, where authors can write information about themselves and their interests in and outside the universe of fan fiction and popular media. In Franceschi’s study (2014), out of 26 subjects, 10 published stories only in English, but even among those who published stories in multiple languages, usually English and their L1, the most frequent choice was to have their profile page entirely in English, in order to maximize accessibility to international fans. In the four cases where the profile page included both English and the writers’ L1, the content expressed varied according to the target audience, as in example (1) below:

(1) Next things will be written in [L1] because only they can understand them anyway, sorry!
Here, the writer marks the switch to her native language and apologizes to her international audience, justifying the language change on the basis that the meaning expressed would be culturally-loaded and as a result, oriented to a specific, local audience. The upcoming switch is therefore justified as the intention to specify an addressee (cf. Klimpfinger, 2007, 2009; Barton and Lee, 2013), which in this case is identified in a more local audience.

Affiliation to a primary linguaculture is however frequently expressed in a specific way within the fan fiction texts in our dataset. While not extremely common, fan fiction writers publishing in ELF sometimes include in their stories elements drawn from their linguistic or cultural backgrounds, providing a localized setting for their pop culture text of choice that allows writers to project elements from their background into ELF discourse and share it with their readers. Often, these references are then explained clearly to international readers in Author’s Notes\(^5\), as in example 2 below:

\[(2) \text{For non-Polish readers: Częstochowa is a city known for Catholic influence.}\]

Here, the writer, an L1 Polish speaker who sets part of her manga-inspired story in Poland, justifies her choice by providing additional information about the location chosen for the fan fiction. This tendency is not only limited to the writers’ primary linguaculture, but can be expanded to other linguacultures that they have been immersed in for a prolonged period, as in example (3):

\[(3) \text{I lived in Hungary for a bit […] “Szia” means “hello” in Hungarian. […] The word “Magyar” means Hungarian.}\]

This author, who spent time in Hungary, uses her knowledge of the language to better characterize the Hungarian character existing in the original text.

References to primary linguacultures through CS practices are even more common in Vettorel’s data, with switches into the bloggers’ L1, Italian, referring to areas such as food, geography, events, songs, films and books (Vettorel, 2014: 221-227). The following extract \((iv: 231)\) nicely exemplifies how code-switches are employed in these personal blogs to refer to socially and culturally loaded elements, while at the same time providing an explanation in English so that the reference can be understood by an English-speaking international audience.
(4) Because you see, I gave him a ring (*uno squillo donnine belle*) [a ring my dear ladies] it’s a common practice in Italy, when you need to tell something and you don’t have money you make the other person’s cellphone ring only once (it can mean “yes” or “I received your message” or another 100 things depending on the context).

In addition, in this case the switch is also meant to address a specific audience the blogger refers to, that is overtly mentioned (*donna belle*). The data contain several other instances where CS is employed to this function either through one-word switches (e.g. *grazie*), or with longer stretches, that are usually in the bloggers’ L1 (*ivi*: 214-217).

Particularly in the fan fiction universe, use of multiple languages in writing is considered a positive trait by the plurilingual writers and readers, as the community is highly diverse and cosmopolitan (Black, 2008; Leppänen et al., 2009). This cosmopolitanism is visible in reader reviews as well, where the use of multiple languages and language alternation is not uncommon; readers may switch into their own L1 when it is shared with the writer, as a means to show solidarity to the writer and highlight the shared linguacultural affiliation. In example 4 below, as well as in Example (1), language alternation is related directly to audience design and addressee specification (Klimpfinger, 2007, 2009), in addition to cultural affiliation.

(5) Hello! Merci pour ton update [...].

The reader, who shares French as an L1 with the writer, “opens the review in English but then continues in French, interspersed with English words and phrases (*please update soon!*)” (Franceschi, 2014: 160).

A similar alternation of languages is also common in Vettorel’s data, whereby participants mix codes, often in small formulaic chunks, as in the following exemplification (Vettorel, 2014: 222):

(6) C (GB) *I love the icons! Molto bella! The animation is ♥*

   B *Ahah, Grazie! :D*

In this comment to a post in English the insertion takes place in Italian, the blogger’s L1, possibly also to affective accommodation aims; in other cases, other Ln are used, such as Spanish or Japanese, as will be seen below.
4.2.2 Interest-based affiliation

As outlined, the internet and Web 2.0 environments in particular provide a range of modes and spaces where users communicate via ELF, often in groups built around professional and personal interests; in these virtual environments users from all over the world interact regularly, also for prolonged periods of time. These interest-based communities, similarly to imagined communities (cf. Anderson, 1991; Mauranen, 2012) are constructed upon a sense of affinity and membership shared by all participants, and are neither geographically-bound nor linguistically homogeneous. Affiliation to these communities can be expressed through linguistic behavior, including language choice and language alternation phenomena such as those described above for primary linguaculture.

In the fan fiction universe, as in other Web 2.0-based environments, interest-based plurilingual practices are very common. Indeed, international fans of Japanese comics and animation (manga and anime), frequently intersperse English with words and expressions drawn from Japanese (Black, 2008; Leppänen et al., 2009; Franceschi, 2014). In the case of fan fiction, in Franceschi’s data Japanese may be used as an authenticity device within the stories, that immerses the readers in the linguacultural setting of the story and provides a thorough characterization of the Japanese characters by including, in the dialogues, words or catchphrases that are typical of the characters in the original text as in (7) below.

(7) “See, you can improve if you work hard.” He showed him the grammar exercises he’d done and there were a few correct answers. “Sugoi,” Hiro sighed in a sarcastic tone. (Awesome, jp) “Mada mada da ne, Senpai!” Aki chuckled. (You still have a long way to go, jp) (emphasis added)

In addition, Japanese is also employed by aficionados of manga and anime as a marker of membership and affiliation to the community of fans, and this emerges in both our sets of data. The fan fiction writers do not only use Japanese in the text, but in the paratext, too: profile pages, Author’s Notes and comments to reviews often include Japanese formulaic language such as greetings, opening and closing formulas. Readers, as well, tend to include Japanese words and formulaic expressions in their comments so as to position themselves as fellow fans and in order to show solidarity and affiliation to the writers. Similarly, in Vettorel’s personal
blogs data short, often formulaic insertions in Japanese could be identified as markers of affiliation (2014: 223-224). This use of Japanese positions the participants as fans of manga and anime highlighting, within the community, their knowledge of that linguaculture. In addition, in the fan fiction dataset informal opening formulas such as Konnichiwa (hello) are especially common in both Author’s notes and reviews. Other Japanese formulas found in reviews are onegai (please), ‘ja ne’ and its formal correspondent ja mata (see you later) and ganbatte (good luck), some of which can also be found in the manga and anime-related blogs in Vettorel’s data.

To sum up, polylingual languaging and heteroglossia are not uncommon in social spaces where the main interest is related to a specific linguaculture that is likely to be extraneous to the majority of the users involved: interspersing ELF with Ln elements, in this case Japanese, makes users immediately recognizable as members to the specific interest-based community as well as add an element of authenticity.

5. Conclusions

As was seen, ELF has acquired a very active and dynamic social dimension in the super-diverse context of CMC, where it is used alongside the user’s L1(s) and other Lns to foster social contacts and share content. People who may not need to use English in their daily life offline, may still use ELF extensively online as they engage in social practices on SNSs (Barton and Lee, 2013: 60). The use of ELF is consistent with the notion of translocality, as both fan fiction writers and bloggers have created social bonds in a virtual, de-territorialized global environment, using other languages to achieve and negotiate cross-cultural communication. While fan fiction writing and blogging are two different modes of CMC, the data have shown similarities in the social and communicative functions language alternation practices fulfill in the text and comments.

English in online social spaces is employed to address international audiences, but it was seen that other languages in the participants’ repertoires, be they L1(s) or Lns, are frequently used in these two modes in relation to audience design, whereby language choice can be seen as an identity marker in addressing more localised audiences on the one hand (cf. example 1), and to express affiliation to primary linguacultures and interest-based communities, or constellations of participants, on the other. The adaptation of ELF for these purposes contributes to audience design in a way that may be both inclusive and exclusive. As exemplified, when English is adapted, the
underlying aim is to clarify the local concept to a global audience, as well as to involve readers more fully in the narration of fiction or personal content. On the other hand, when code-switching is employed, an additional translation or explanation is generally provided, too, for the switched element to be accessible to a wider audience. While in the fan fiction universe, this use could have a more functional role, as it provides readers with the means to access the text in its entirety (cf. examples 2,3), in blogging it serves primarily a social role, aiming at involving the international audience in the localised, culturally-bound experience (4). At the same time, as was seen, in these online social spaces code-switching may also be used to restrict the audience from a global to either a local one, as in the case with switches into the L1, or an interest-based group, as illustrated in relation to the manga and anime fan community (cf example 7), where speakers intersperse their texts with Japanese elements. Ln(s) may also be used by commenters in blog posts and fan fiction as a means to show affiliation and solidarity with the writers by addressing them in their L1.

The data analyzed here confirms the nature of ELF as a protean, fluid code in Web 2.0-based contexts as well as face to face ones; the introduction of non-English and hybrid forms in online interactions does not hinder communication, but allows users to communicate linguacultural and affiliation content internationally and position themselves as members of specific communities through a skillful use of their plurilingual repertoires and ELF, carefully and effectively exploiting their plurilingual repertoires to audience-design aims.

1 <http://www.internetworldstats.com/emarketing.htm> (last access 27.07.2014).
2 <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm> (last access 27.07.2014).
3 Lee (2014) draws from Crandall’s 2007 definition of ‘presentational culture’, where users have a heightened awareness of the image of their self that they present through social media: «within these presentational environments, performance and role-playing reign supreme […] and new forms of subjectivity emerge» (Crandall, 2007. Retrieved from <http://jordan-crandall.com/main/+SHOWING/index.html> [last access 01.02.2016]).
4 With the exception of ‘appealing for assistance’, presumably because of the specificities of the online setting (Vettorel, 2014; Franceschi, 2014).
5 Notes that are written at the beginning or the end of a story/story chapter, which provide additional background and information on the plot, characters and process of writing.
6 The first one is employed generally by readers in reviews to urge writers to update the story with new chapters, while *ja ne* and *ja mata* are closing formulas which may be used to conclude a review (Franceschi, 2014). Japanese interjections were also identified in the comments, namely *wah* and *kyaaa*, which expressed enthusiastic approval for the stories (Franceschi, 2014).
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