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Balancing the Territorial and Cooperative Imperatives in Computer-Mediated Communication

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Abstract

This contribution focuses on a small selection of websites for Italian companies specializing in local products. Since these companies have decided to address their international audiences by adopting and adapting the English language, the analysis will explore the problems which tend to arise when one set of native usage conventions comes into contact and into conflict with another. In particular, relying on a qualitative approach, the study will try to determine whether, based on the features of the language displayed on the corporate websites, the texts can be qualified as instances of either localized or globalized EIL.

Keywords: ELF; computer-mediated communication; localized EIL; globalized EIL.

1. Introduction

Globalization is a difficult concept to define. Some people think it is merely a synonym for global business and trade, but actually it is much more than that. Globalization brings people of all nations closer to each other and, leaving aside its side effects in terms of economic disparities and inequalities, it acts indeed as a bond that transcends national differences. In McGrew's words it describes: "the process by which events, decisions, and activities in one part of the world can come to have significant consequences for individuals and communities in quite distant parts of the globe" (1992: 23). Moreover,

the growing extensity, intensity and velocity of global interactions is associated with a deepening enmeshment of the local consequences, creating a growing collective awareness or consciousness of the world as a shared social space, that is, globality or globalism (Held and McGrew 2007: 3).

As a consequence, a common language becomes essential in order to develop this process of interaction and integration among people, companies and governments. Without it, there would be no mutual

understanding and therefore no collaboration, and globalization would eventually fail, as pointed out by Friedman (2005).

Nowadays the extraordinary spread of the English language around the world has made it the primary means of world-wide communication, even to the extent that non-native speakers of English outnumber native speakers many times over (Hülmbauer,Böhringer, Seidlhofer 2008: 27). In global interactions, English has become "the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option" (Seidlhofer 2011: 7), making it the global lingua franca, both in everyday and business-professional contexts.

This contribution aims at investigating the possible problems which might arise when one set of native usage conventions comes into contact and into conflict with another. By focusing on a selection of Italian websites for companies specializing in local products and relying on a qualitative approach the study will explore the features of the language displayed, with a view to ascertaining whether these texts can be considered as instances of either localized or globalized EIL.

From a contextual point of view, this study will first provide some background information on the main issues in the localized vs globalized EIL debate. After a description of the objectives, methods and materials, preliminary data will be provided from a small-scale case study carried out on the websites of four Italian companies located in Sardinia and specializing in local products,

2. Communication process and globalization 3.0

Globalization has both been criticized as "largely a myth" (Hirst and Thompson 1996: 2) and been acclaimed as "the concept of the 1990s, a key idea by which we understand the transition of human society into the third millennium" (Waters 1995: 1). Although there is no universally accepted definition of the term, it has quite appreciable consequences. For instance, human languages in the age of globalization are no longer tied to stable and resident communities, but travel across the globe, and are subject to changes in the process. This is why Blommaert (2010) stresses the importance of revising our understanding of linguistic communication . In fact, with countries and also individuals having to collaborate and compete globally, the dynamics of communication processes cannot but be affected. One of the first changes concerns, for instance, the role of languages used for the purpose of communicating across national borders in general, and

the role of the English language in this in particular. This is true to such an extent that Charles (2007) suggested an interesting parallel between the three different stages of globalization, as categorised by Friedman (2005), and the subsequent changes in the way English was used in non Anglophone countries. In the past, language was seen as a system that had to be studied and learned by only a limited number of experts, as only a few people had contacts across borders (stage 1.0). The actual turning point was the advent of the internationalization process characterizing Friedman's stage 2.0 (companies globalizing), which was accompanied by a real need to 'communicate' in English. Nowadays, with the beginning of stage 3.0 and the subsequent globalization of the 'individual', supported and driven by new powerful technologies, the need for another approach to language has emerged, i.e. one that underlines the fact that the new environment is global and diverse, with different national cultures being part of it. Therefore, what is needed now are the skills to create, facilitate, maintain and expand communicative interactions, at both individual and corporate levels, in different locations and between people who belong to communities which go beyond national borders.

2.1. The cooperative and territorial principles

Communication depends on getting the balance between two opposing forces right (Widdowson 1983: 47-48). The first derives from the territorial imperative, which makes the individual strive to protect his/her own life space from the threat of invading influence. The other is a function of the cooperative imperative which encourages the individual to assume a social role, for his/her own good, and to accept a modification to his/her world in return for social benefits. This very idea has been expanded further by Seidlhofer (2009a: 195) by focusing on English as a Lingua Franca, which, due to its extremely widespread and frequent use by speakers from a vast number of first-language communities, provides the most suitable arena for investigating language contact, variation and these two imperatives at work (Seidlhofer 2009a: 195ff).

Seidlhofer compares the cooperative function to what John Sinclair calls ''the idiom principle'' (Sinclair 1991: 110), observing that interlocutors tend to cooperate by using conventionally pre-constructed phrases that they are all familiar with.

However, she then adds that, although the idiom principle seems to be brought about by the cooperative imperative, the particular

idiomatic wordings that the principle gives rise to in the usage of a particular language also take on a territorial function when they become established as a conventional resource for communication, as ''pre-constructions'' within a community of language users. They thus function as territorial markers of social identity and group membership (Seidlhofer 2009a: 195ff).

This can explain why, for instance, a non-Italian speaking (in English) with an Italian, might be unable to understand what the Italian means exactly by saying: "I'm cold. I'll go and put on a warmer *golf"* or "I like *footing"*. On the contrary, a fellow Italian would soon understand the two above utterances, knowing that the word *golf* (which probably derives from *golf jacket*) is used to refer to a cardigan, while *footing* was often used in the past (less frequently in present times) as a substitute for *jogging*. In these two cases, the particular usages of the two words have become established as a pre-construction/conventional resource for communication within the speech community of Italian language users, i.e. within a set of "speakers of the same (native) language" (Fishman 1971: 232).

The present study, however, will not deal with contacts among people who "share a piece of land" (Pennycook 2007:p.19), as it will focus on the interactions between Italian companies and their international audiences. Attention will be mainly focused on how language is used outside people's primary social spaces and speech communities. Reference will not be made to communities as relatively stable places in which local cultures can thrive and find expression (cf. Seidllhofer 2011: 75), but rather to a constellation of interconnected practices (Ehrenreich 2009) that has been formed as a consequence of the Italian companies' decision to address their international audiences through websites in English.

3. The spread of the English language

English has become the international language *par excellence* in two different ways. On the one hand, it has developed into many localized instances of EIL or World Englishes (primarily through colonization), with variations in usage which have naturally developed endonormatively. On the other hand, when there is no pre-defined target audience or culture with which communication can a priori be associated , English is chosen as the shared communicative medium. This gives rise to globalized instances of EIL, which are often referred to as ELF. ELF comes to life in a common 'third' space to which both

the sender and the recipient of an international exchange may contribute. In these contexts, it is not enough to call up elements of the English language and employ them as 'correctly as possible' (Seidlhofer 2009b: 242). On the contrary, it is necessary to be aware and learn to exploit the potential of the language, adapting it to the pragmatic needs of the third space developed by the dynamic, often temporary communities that ELF users may form and identify with (Poppi 2012: 215). As 'electronic propinquity' (Korzenny 1978) has replaced 'physical propinquity', these communities, which jointly subscribe to variable ways of using English, are not constrained by spatial limitations, as they are mainly virtual.

Even though both the territorial and the cooperative imperatives are important for keeping interlocutors on board and engaged (Seidlhofer 2009a: 198) in ELF interactions, the cooperative imperative has been observed to prevail over the territorial one (see Poppi 2012), as the globalized reach of ELF tends to make the need to communicate stronger than the desire to assert one's social or national identity. In fact, one of the underlying assumptions on which the present analysis is based is that ELF is strongly influenced by the cooperative imperative, as what really matters is that communication takes place and information is actually exchanged between the parties involved in the interaction. On the contrary, in localized EIL, the territorial imperative seems to prevail alongside the desire to prove one's appropriation of the language, and the ability to shape it in accordance with one country's or community's particular situation and culture.

4. Objective, materials and method

Internationalization seems to be the new buzz word. In Italy, as a consequence of the shaky global economy and of the difficult situation at home, many companies are trying to attract overseas customers in the hope of boosting their somewhat stagnant turnover. In order to do this they have shown willingness to use a common language different from their own and to address their international stakeholders by means of, among other things, websites in English. In doing so, they may also want to stand out from other, less internationalized local competitors. In this way, the use of ELF may also change a company's image locally, because it may be perceived as characterized by a global reach even within its own community. This issue has not been investigated in the present study, however.

The present analysis will explore a small corpus, totalling about 15,000 tokens, made up of the 2007 versions of four websites from companies operating in Sardinia and specialising in local products.

Corporate websites, defined by Furuta and Marshall (1995: 1) as "set(s) of hypermedia document genres", provide companies with a relatively common framework, which includes different genres such as home pages, FAQs, hotlists and contact pages, connected to one another through intertextuality. Websites have been said to display the features of a kind of written language which has been pulled some way in the direction of speech, and which is identical to neither speech nor writing, but selectively and adaptively displays properties of both" (Crystal 2001: 47).

The companies chosen for the analysis all belong to the agro-food sector, in which the reputation of the made-in-Italy label is still going strong. They are: *Cantina Sociale di Santadi*, *Ferruccio Podda SpA*; *Bresca Dorada*, and *Copar*. The four companies were chosen because they produce and market typical Sardinian products; they export their products abroad; they use English in the hope of arousing the interest of international customers, and they have a website which is available in English. Coincidentally, all four are located in the southern part of Sardinia. *Cantina Sociale di Santadi, Bresca Dorada* and *Copar* employ fewer than 50 people and can therefore be considered small-sized businesses, while the *Podda* dairy, with 50 employees, can be classified as a medium-sized enterprise. *Cantina Sociale di Santadi* was established in 1960 and produces both red (*Terre brune, Rocca Rubia, Araja, Grotta Rossa)* and white wines (*Villa di Chiesa, Cala Silente, Petraia* and *Villa Solais)*. The dairy *Ferruccio Podda* was founded in 1952 and is named after its founder. Its products, ranging from milk to fresh and mature cheese, yoghurt, ricotta and mozzarella, are made in accordance with the ancient Sardinian traditions, inherited from local shepherds and farmers. *Bresca Dorada*, originally established in 1986 when its founders decided to market the honey they obtained from over 600 beehives, now also specialises in the production of *Mirto*, a myrtle liqueur. *Copar* was founded in 1962 and sells oil, olives and olive paste by combining modern technology with production methods inherited from a century-old tradition.

Starting from the assumption that the features of both globalized and localized EIL are intersubjectively constructed and negotiated by each set of speakers (Canagarajah 2009: 15), the analysis will start from a previously devised and applied taxonomy (Poppi 2012: 77), which includes seven features:

- local words with international currency;
- local words with national currency;
- common words used with new shades of meaning;
- names of people and places;
- culture-induced expressions;
- code-mixing, i.e. the presence of new hybrid compounds originating from the merging together of terms from two different L1s;
- code-switching, which can often take the form of loanwords from the writer's L1.

The above taxonomy was developed on the basis of the evidence provided by the articles of a daily newspaper published in English in India, *The Hindustan Times*. It was therefore originally meant to help identify and classify the instances of localized EIL in the written articles produced and published in a country belonging to Kachru's (1992) outer circle. In India, the English language performs many in-country functions and is, as such, particularly prone to undergoing modifications (Lowenberg 2002) under the influence of the territorial imperative, which makes its users rely on a set of pre-constructions with which they are familiar. In the case of Italy, with few in-country uses, the widespread assumption is that fewer modifications will occur. Accordingly, a revised version of the taxonomy has been adopted for the purpose of the present analysis. It includes the following categories, ranked according to the increasing influence of the territorial imperative:

- local words with international currency;
- code-mixing;
- code-switching.

The qualitative analysis will not focus on variation in terms of discrete units, but the observed phenomena will be interpreted in terms of what they refer to, with a view to establishing whether they may lead the different websites to be qualified as mainly characterized by instances of either globalized or localized EIL.

5. The analysis

5.1. Local words with international currency

The popularity of the products of the Italian agro-food sector has made some local terms and expressions gain international currency.

This is for instance the case with the italicized terms mentioned below:

1)   Classification: *Vermentino di Sardegna* (*Cantina di Santadi*);
2)   […] its products, from milk to "yoghurt", from *mozzarella* to "*pecorino*"… (*Ferruccio Podda*);
3)   […] our "*Ricotta*" which is available fresh, dry or smoked, our "*Mozzarelle*"… (*Ferruccio Podda*);
4)   […] cook the *spaghetti* in salt water until they are *al dente*, drain them and place them in a pan… (*Copar*);
5)   Ingredients: *parmigiano* (*Copar*);
6)   The *Buona Tavola* Olives, with their delicate flavour are ideal for starters … (*Copar*).

5.2. Code-mixing

The analysis of the websites has also shown the presence of some instances of code-mixing, where words coming from the Italian and the English languages are joined together:

7)   The fortress rises *Breads* Loriga (Pani Loriga) (m 183) (*Cantina di Santadi);*
8)   The road winds along the *rio* Cannas *stream* (*Bresca Dorada*);
9)   the mother of the spouse and the father of the spouse offer to the *neo-*spouses … (*Cantina di Santadi*);
10)   Explore with us the characteristics of our delicious products ranging from the traditional "*Mature* Classico" (*Ferruccio Podda*).

In examples 7) and 8) the names of a local mountain and stream are modified by having the first part of the name of the mountain translated into English (*Breads*) and the name of the watercourse flanked by the Italian and English form (*rio* and stream). In 9) the typical Italian prefix neo-, which means *new, recent*, or *a new or modern form or development as in neoclassicism[1]*, is combined with the word *spouse* to form an unusual and uncommon instance of word compounding. Finally in 10) the word *Classico* is preceded by the English adjective *mature*.

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[1] http://dictionary.reverso.net/english-definition/neo

Different theorists have suggested different procedures for the translation of cultural items, because one of the most recurrent difficulties encountered by translators is to find equivalents for culture-bound terms (cf. Newmark 1988). Where such terms do not exist in the target language, Newmark recommends that they be clearly identified by a "translation label", i.e. a provisional translation, usually made with inverted commas, until and unless it becomes generally accepted.

In the cases under scrutiny here, the only example that could actually fit Newmark's description is 10).

5.3. Code-switching

While some linguists have warned of language endangerment as a result of the globalization of today's world, little attention has been paid to the new forms of individual and societal multilingualism that it has produced. Blommaert (2010) for instance, proposes a "sociolinguistics of mobile resources", which should acknowledge the variable communicative capacities and functions of the different languages spoken by individual speakers.

In contrast with, and in addition to, a previously mentioned category, which included words which have achieved international currency, it is worth mentioning the presence, on all the websites, of words and expressions which are in fact kept in their Italian form or even in the local dialect.

11)   The vegetation is a *variopinto* sample of Mediterranean spot: *lecci, ulivi, corbezzolo*, oaks from cork that change aspect with the changing of the seasons (*Cantina di Santadi*);

12)   Grape varieties: *carignato* and *bovaleddu* (*Cantina di Santadi*);

13)   in correspondence of *furriadroxius*[2] ... (*Cantina di Santadi*);

14)   Currently we have 60 different products and we are constantly developing new products. It is this motivation that led us to produce "*caciotte di Pecora*" (*Ferruccio Podda*);

15)   *Filoncino* gr 2000: 5 pieces per package (*Ferruccio Podda*);

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[2] This term designates a housing unit built by the early settlers on a rugged, sparsely populated and geographically isolated area, with a predominantly agro-pastoral economy.

16)   This cheese is produced under EU regulations and has been awarded DOP-REG. EEC 1263/96, which means the origin of the cheese is guaranteed (*Ferruccio Podda*);

17)   As we work in close contact with the most advanced laboratories, research centres and Universities under the auspices of the *TALASO* Project, we are in the forefront of meeting the project's goal of improving "know how" and "taste" (*Ferruccio Podda*);

18)   Olive variety: *tonda di Cagliari*, *pitz'é carroga, bosana*, (*Copar*);

19)   Recipes: *Pan bagnà* with olives. Ingredients: French loaf bread, tomatoes, *Copar* olives, black ground pepper, *Copar* olive oil (*Copar*);

20)   the *Colline Sard*e extra virgin olive oil. The olives can be enjoyed in brine, baked or done in the "*Scabecciu*" method; preserved in oil and vinegar and seasoned with parsley and garlic thus becoming a tasty starter or side dish (*Copar*).

In almost all of the above cases, e.g. 12), 13), 14), 15), 16), 17), 18), 19) and 20), the Italian words employed are closely connected with the country's national and gastronomic culture. Their use is in line with the territorial imperative and further contributes to the Italianness and authenticity of the products. This is also the case with example 11), where the presence of "*variopinto*", and "*lecci*", "*ulivi*", "*corbezzolo*" which, unlike "oaks", have been kept in Italian, further contributes to highlighting the distinctly Italian origin of the products.

5.4. Accommodation strategies

Mutual communication and the exchange of information is enhanced by the deployment of accommodation strategies, which may take the form of glosses, explanations, information packaging and simplifications (Poppi, 2012). Also in the 2007 versions of the four websites, it is possible to find several instances of accommodation strategies, which may take the form of "descriptive equivalents" (Newmark 1988) as in 21), 22) or "loan translations" (Newmark 1988) as in 24), 25) and 26).

21)   Goat's milk cheese "*Caprino*" (*Ferruccio Podda*);
22)   white pear shaped cheese (*perette*) (*Ferruccio Podda*);

23)   From the fruit of the myrtle plant, gathered on the island of Sardinia, we of "*Bresca Dorada*" make our exclusive liqueur "*Mirto Rosso*" (*Bresca Dorada*).

24)   *Braciolette di abbacchio*: ingredient: ribs, artichokes… (*Copar*);

25)   *Bresca Dorada*, golden beehive, … (*Bresca Dorada*);

26)   The environment surrounding the company premises looks over one of the most enchanting stretches of sea of the Island, while on the other side it reaches up to the slopes of the *Sette Fratelli* (Seven Brothers) mountains… (*Bresca Dorada*).

In other cases, extra information is provided in addition to the specific culture-bound Italian expression, which may refer to traditional Sardinian buildings, as in 27) and 28) or names of places, as in 29) and 30). The ultimate goal of all the deployed strategies is to reach out to the international audience, safeguarding meanwhile the idea of Italianness and authenticity:

27)   Nuraghe Diana (a traditional Sardinian construction) *(Cantina di Santadi)*;

28)   In the typical small one roomed cottages called "sas pinnettas", the farmers used to produce cheese and ricotta using only natural ingredients… (*Ferruccio Podda*);

29)   the Sulcis-Iglesiente is a region of the Sardinia that extends for 170 Km between the plain of the Campidano and the south-western coast of the island (*Bresca Dorada);*

30)   Partes olea: is the name that Romans gave to the hilly region on the south-eastern border of Sardinian's vast alluvial plain known as "Campidano of Cagliari" (*Copar*).

6. Discussion of findings

It has been observed elsewhere that language users tend to shape their adopted means of communication by referring to their culturally-defined schemata, enacted in the process of performance (see Pennycook 2007). When they do this, they are under the influence of the territorial imperative. By contrast, when they try to reach out to their interlocutors, they are applying the cooperative imperative.

The impact of the former tends to take the form of lexically innovative expressions or words, which change according to each community of language users. This is why, in order to classify them successfully, it is advisable to refer to a series of categories. In the present study, reference has in fact been made to: "local words with international currency", "code-mixing" and "code-switching".

Rather than by focusing on single words or expressions, the impact of the cooperative imperative can be appreciated by investigating the communicative strategies deployed. In the case under scrutiny here, all four companies have been observed to employ accommodation strategies, which have taken the form of code-glosses and the provision of further details and explanations. This is in line with the globalized EIL or ELF paradigm, according to which the parties involved in the communicative exchange choose a common "lingua franca" for the purpose of exchanging information.

The features observed prove that in the websites of the four Italian companies, English is used alongside other linguistic resources, namely Italian. These two languages peacefully co-exist as parts of the linguistic repertoire shared by the members of the virtual community under scrutiny here, and do not compete for the same linguistic space. In other words, the instances of code-mixing and code-switching cannot simply be labelled as a consequence of the interference of the writer's L1. In fact, the presence of hybrid compounds and of Italian loans serves the purpose of conveying that sense of Italianness and authenticity which can provide an added value to the description of the company and its products, in consideration of the Italian agro-food sector's long-established reputation for high quality.

At the same time, the presence of these terms does not impede the international audience's comprehension of the texts, as several clues can be found in the co-text, which contribute to making their meaning clearer.

This can, for instance, be observed in example 11), where *variopinto* almost functions as a "luxury loan", in that it is not indispensable for decodifying the message and only adds to the "Italian flavour". *Lecci*, *ulivi* and *corbezzoli* have been retained in Italian, but it is possible to infer that they refer to different kinds of trees thanks to their being associated with "oaks".

In other words, as stated by Seidlhofer (2011: 68ff), once English is conceived of as a common property and thus freed from the ties that bind it to its native speakers and their national interests, it becomes

available as an additional resource to be drawn upon as and when functionally required.

7. Conclusions

Communication in general, and in ELF in particular, can be enhanced by strategies of accommodation, which may take the form of code glosses, explanations, explications, piling up of information (see also Poppi, 2012). On the contrary, it may be hindered when the territorial imperative brings about too many lexical innovations and/or localized forms which can only be understood by the members of a local speech community of language users.

The analysis of the 2007 versions of the websites of four companies specializing in local products from Sardinia has shown that when a set of native usage conventions comes into contact with another it does not necessarily come into conflict with it, if provisions are made to cater to the needs of the non-local audiences. In fact, alongside instances of code-mixing and code-switching, attesting to the influence of the territorial imperative, accommodation strategies have also been deployed. Therefore, it is possible to state that all the analyzed websites show, to a greater or lesser degree, a tendency to use globalized EIL or ELF, rather than merely instances of localized EIL.

The preliminary results of this small-scale study cannot, as such, claim to be exhaustive, and will need validation by means of further research carried out on a wider scale. They seem, nonetheless, in line with the tendency observed in expanding circle settings by Seidlhofer (2011: 79) to rely on national lingua cultures and, at the same time, to participate in the 'international community'.

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