

# Features of ELF interactions in travel blogs: Travelers doing interactional work

**María-José Luzón**

Universidad de Zaragoza (España)

mjluzon@unizar.es

## Abstract

Travel blogs constitute a new platform where travelers can tell about their travel experiences and share information and impressions with their readers. Most travel blogs incorporate commenting capabilities, which enable social interaction among members of communities with shared traveling interests. English is most often used as a Lingua Franca, facilitating interaction among people with different L1 backgrounds and transcending the native/non-native distinction. The purpose of this research is to analyze the features of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) interactions in travel blogs and explore some strategies used by participants in blog discussions to achieve shared understanding and show belonging to an ELF community. The small corpus consists of 36 blog discussions taken from 12 blogs where the commenters belong to different L1 backgrounds. The corpus was analyzed qualitatively to determine whether some strategies used in ELF interactions (make it normal, backchanneling, code-switching, and metacomments) occur in travel blogs and, if so, how they contribute to identity and community construction.

**Keywords:** travel blogs, ELF, interactional strategies, online communication, identity.

## Resumen

*Características de las interacciones en ILF en los blogs de viaje: El trabajo interaccional de los viajeros*

Los blogs de viajes constituyen una nueva plataforma donde los viajeros cuentan sus experiencias y comparten información e impresiones con sus lectores. La mayoría permiten comentarios, lo que posibilita la interacción social entre miembros de comunidades que comparten un interés por viajar. Con frecuencia

se usa el Inglés como Lengua Franca, para facilitar la interacción entre interlocutores con lenguas maternas diferentes. El objetivo de esta investigación es analizar las características de las interacciones en Inglés como Lengua Franca (ILF) en blogs de viajes y determinar las estrategias usadas por los participantes en las discusiones para negociar el significado y alcanzar mutua inteligibilidad. El corpus analizado está formado por 36 discusiones tomadas de 12 blogs donde participan hablantes de diferentes lenguas maternas. El corpus fue analizado de forma cualitativa para determinar si algunas estrategias usadas en interacciones en ILF (aceptar como normal, backchanneling, cambio de código, y metacomentarios) aparecen en los blogs de viajes y cómo contribuyen a la creación de la identidad y a construir solidaridad y cohesión grupal.

**Palabras clave:** blogs de viajes, ILF, estrategias interaccionales, comunicación online, identidad.

## 1. Introduction

Social media have changed radically the way travelers search, produce and use travel-related information (Akehurst, 2009). Blogs are one of the several forms of social media that tourists use as an alternative to traditional travel guides to inform their decisions. Blogs are personal journals consisting of regularly updated posts arranged in reverse chronological order, where readers are often allowed to contribute comments. They are, therefore, a platform both for self-expression and for social interaction and information sharing (Schmidt, 2007; Myers, 2010). They offer travelers an open space to share their personal travel experiences and to interact with the interested readers, which generates collaboratively produced information (Wenger, 2008). This exchange and collaborative construction of information is facilitated by the use of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). As travel blogs are usually public and anyone can contribute to the discussion, English is used by bloggers with different language backgrounds who want to reach an international audience. The use of ELF enables bloggers and their readers to construct cross-linguistic virtual communities, where members have shared traveling interests.

As a result of the increasing popularity of travel blogs, a considerable body of research has been conducted on the impact of blogs on tourists and their uses in marketing. Research has focused mainly on the influence of blogs on decisions regarding destination, on the representation of destinations in blogs or on blogger satisfaction (e.g. Akehurst, 2009; Volo, 2010). Only a few

studies have analyzed the discursive features of travel blogs or the processes of identity construction and meaning negotiation in which bloggers engage (e.g. Goethals, 2013, 2015; Lee & Gretzel, 2014) and, to my knowledge, there is no study of the use of ELF in travel blogs. This research focuses on the interactional strategies deployed by communities of travel bloggers and commenters from different L1s when using English as the lingua franca to communicate internationally. More specifically, the purpose of this paper is to analyze four strategies used in ELF interactions to signal solidarity, display a shared identity and construct community (make it normal, backchanneling, code-switching, and metacomments) in order to determine whether these strategies occur in travel blogs and the bloggers' motivation for using them.

## 2. Travel blogs

There are many different types of blogs, which vary in terms of authorship (e.g. individual blogs, institutional blogs, community blogs, corporate blogs), format (e.g. textual blogs, audioblogs, videoblogs, lifelogs) or topic (e.g. personal blogs, travel blogs, technology blogs, style blogs, political blogs). A common dichotomy is that between blogs which focus on external events and those that focus on the blogger's personal life (Blood, 2002). This is not, however, a clear-cut distinction, since most blogs mix "topic" and "personal" elements (Vettorel, 2014).

Travel blogs, in particular, combine personal blogging with topic blogging. Travelers publish narratives about their own personal travel experiences with the purpose of providing useful and trustworthy information about destinations for a wide audience (Lee & Gretzel, 2014). Travel blogs may deal with any travel-related aspect, e.g. describing places and local lifestyles, explaining how to apply for a visa, advising on what to do or see at the destination (Wu & Pearce, 2014). They may therefore have different communicative purposes: they may focus on a description of what has been done in the journey, on information of practical interest for the readers, on the evaluation of the journey, with recommendations or advice against certain aspects, or on the narrative itself, reflecting on the journey or narrating a story (Goethals, 2013). Lee and Gretzel (2014: 39) describe them as both "multimedia versions of traditional travel diaries or scrapbooks", which combine written text and photos taken by the blogger (and sometimes video and audio), and "venues for social interaction", through comments

from readers, who may ask questions or contribute further content about any aspect (e.g. must-see places, where to buy or eat). Thus, although they present stories of the tourist's personal experience at a specific destination, travel blogs are intended for interaction with an audience of similarly minded travelers (Lee & Gretzel, 2014).

The description of travel blogs above shows that they display the features that according to Herring (2012b: 2) characterize Web 2.0 technology: “participatory information sharing; user-generated content; an ethic of collaboration; and use of the web as a social platform”. Travel blogs share these features with other modes of 2.0. tourism communication, like *Wikitravel*, tourist review and rating websites (e.g. *Tripadvisor*) or microblogging in social networks (e.g. *Twitter*, *Facebook*). However, the blog seems to be the best suited tool to create and maintain a community of like-minded travelers. While *Wikitravel* is topic-oriented, providing information on tourist destinations, and review websites focus on evaluation and recount of personal experience of a specific product, blogs “provide a holistic understanding of the tourist experience” (Munar, 2010: 15), with a focus on journey narrative, experience sharing and community creation. As narratives of travel experiences and venues for social interaction, travel blogs provide the reader with a picture both of the bloggers' individual and social identities.

The participants in travel blog interactions usually belong to different lingua-cultures<sup>1</sup> and therefore they do not constitute a speech community as defined in the traditional way. They constitute, however, a community of practice (CofP) as defined by Wenger (1998). He gives three defining features of CofPs: mutual engagement in shared practices, participation in jointly negotiated enterprise, use of a shared repertoire of member resources. These resources include linguistic resources, like a shared language. ELF is a lingua-cultural resource used by many CofPs whose members do not share a first language to negotiate how to communicate within the community (Cogo, 2010). Individuals who interact through a specific travel weblog or through a network of blogs form a “community of blogging practice”: a group of people “who share certain routines and expectations about the use of blogs as a tool for information, identity, and relationship management” (Schmidt, 2007: 1409).

### 3. Strategies to construct solidarity relations and identity

A significant amount of recent research on ELF has focused on the interactional work or pragmatic strategies that participants in spoken ELF interactions use to achieve communicative effectiveness (e.g. Mauranen, 2006; Cogo, 2009, 2010). Firth (2009b: 162-163) claims that “‘competence’ in ELF interactions, then, entails not so much mastery of a stable and standardized code or form, but mastery of strategies for the accomplishment of accommodation of diverse practices and modes of meaning”. He states that successful lingua franca interactions appear to be characterized by the use of pragmatic strategies to achieve “communicative alignment, adaptation, local accommodation and attunement” (Firth, 2009b: 163). In addition to strategies intended to prevent and solve misunderstandings and negotiate meaning (Mauranen, 2006; Cogo, 2009), interactants also resort to strategies intended to express cooperativeness, construct solidarity and show their belonging to the community of ELF speakers (House, 2003).

In one of the earliest studies of interactional work in ELF communication, Firth (1996) identified two strategies in ELF telephone conversations that could be regarded as acts of cooperation and supportive talk: the “let it pass” principle and the “make it normal” principle. The “let it pass” principle holds that “the hearer lets an unknown or unclear action, word, or utterance ‘pass’ on the (common sense) assumption that it will either become clear or redundant as talk progresses” (Firth, 1996: 243). When employing the second strategy (“make it normal”), the hearer makes the speaker’s erroneous form (e.g. non-standard grammatical form) look normal. The hearer focuses on the content instead and accepts the erroneous form. These are accommodation strategies, by means of which participants in ELF interactions adapt their linguistic behavior towards the hearer’s language use (Hülmbauer, 2007). More recent research has identified a great variety of ELF interactional strategies intended to signal involvement and support and foster cooperativeness and group cohesion. Pitzl, Breiteneder and Klimpfinger (2008) found different types of lexical innovations in a subcorpus of VOICE<sup>2</sup> (Viena-Oxford International Corpus of English). ELF speakers used these lexical innovations to increase clarity and reduce potential ambiguity (e.g. use of “increasement” instead of “increase”), reduce redundancy, regularize irregular forms (e.g. “thought”) or fill a lexical

gap when speakers cannot recall a word (Pitlzl et al., 2008). Similar lexicogrammatical features, deriving from processes of regularization and redundancy reduction (e.g. invariable tags, pluralization of uncountable nouns), increased explicitness, and lexical creativity, were also found to be frequent in the personal blogs by Italian bloggers analyzed by Vettorel (2014). Similarly, in the spoken interactions analyzed by Hülmbauer (2007), ELF speakers sometimes used non-standard or unconventional forms in order to adapt their language to each other and establish rapport. Other supportive strategies used by the ELF speakers participating in Meierkord's (2000) study are backchanneling, both verbal (e.g. *mbm, right, yeah, I see, yes*) and non-verbal (e.g. head nods), supportive laughter and excessive use of cajolers (e.g. *you know, you see*). Backchanneling is used not only to show active listening and involvement, but also to elicit more speech and signal agreement (Cogo & Dewey, 2012).

Strategies used to express group belonging are also highly frequent in ELF interactions. For instance, ELF speakers accommodate to each other by co-constructing *pro-tem* (i.e. *pro tempore*, temporary) idiomatic expressions online for their own local purposes (Seidlhofer, 2009). According to Seidlhofer (2009: 195), these expressions serve to show belonging to the “here-and-now group” and thus create a “shared affective space”. Kalocsai (2011) found that ELF students developed shared negotiable resources to construct friendship and build an Erasmus family, e.g. a set of negotiated forms used to accomplish everyday tasks such as greetings, thanking or apologizing. Code-switching has also been found to be one of the most prominent linguistic resources to construct solidarity and group cohesion both in spoken and online ELF interactions (Cogo, 2009; Vettorel, 2014). In ELF contexts code-switching is often used to signal a multilingual identity and the speaker's membership to individual ELF communities of practice, and to indicate rapport to the interlocutor's culture and create a friendly atmosphere (Cogo, 2009; Klimpfinger, 2009; Vettorel, 2014). Vettorel (2014) found that Italian bloggers using ELF in their blogs blended in linguistic elements (single lexical items, short phrases or longer passages) both from their L1 and from other languages for several communicative purposes, but specially to signal different cultural affiliations. Plurilinguality is exploited by the bloggers in her corpus “to express aspects related to their cultural and multicultural identities” (Vettorel, 2014: 293) and to refer to concepts related to the cultures of the groups they are part of and want to show an affiliation to. Another strategy found in Vettorel's (2014) corpus to show group

belonging was comments about the participants' self-perceived inadequate proficiency of the language. These comments create in-group bonding ties with the other participants that share a common status of non-nativeness.

The use of plurilingual resources in ELF settings is related to the fact that for ELF users English is the language of communication, while their L1s are (usually) their language of identification, the language they are bound to (Klimpfinger, 2009). Therefore, ELF speakers in every ELF situation may incorporate their L1 or the L1 of their interlocutors to show cultural affiliation. Code-switching enables the speakers to create identities in every ELF situation anew, as proposed in the face model developed by O'Driscoll (2001) to explore identity in multilingual settings. This model proposes three aspects of face (ethnolinguistic, cosmopolitan and polite), which can be instantiated through language choice, and conceptualizes identity as an outcome of the interaction.

Research on tourism discourse has also shown that language choice is a resource for identity construction and that code-switching and metapragmatic comments can act as in-grouping and out-grouping devices (Jaworski et al., 2004; Cappelli, 2013; Goethals, 2015). The notion of language crossing, i.e. "switching into languages that are not generally thought to belong to you" (Rampton, 1995: 280), has been used to discuss the functions and representations of local languages in tourism discourse. Jaworski et al. (2004), for example, in their study of the use of non-English local languages in British TV holiday programs, found that the instances of crossing into local languages enabled the viewers to construct their identities as members of the community of (international-British) tourists. Metacomments (i.e. metalinguistic and metapragmatic comments) on incomprehensibility of the local languages were also found to serve the function of creating social boundaries between the "self" and the "other" (the locals).

#### **4. Corpus and method**

The material for the present study consists of a small corpus of ELF interactions in travel blogs. The data analyzed are 36 blog discussions (i.e. blogposts and the comments that they triggered), taken from 12 travel blogs, where interlocutors from different lingua-cultures participate. Since the main purpose of this study is to analyze ELF strategies in blog interactions, the

first criterion to select travel blogs was the presence of a high number of comments to the posts, that is, their popularity as a platform to exchange information. Popular travel blogs were identified through searches in Google using the keywords “popular travel blogs” and “top travel blogs”. The search yielded a list of several sites which had put together their lists of the best/top travel blogs, e.g. “The Top 50 Travel Blogs” ([www.theexpeditioner.com/the-top-50-travel-blogs](http://www.theexpeditioner.com/the-top-50-travel-blogs)), “TOP 100 Travel Sites” ([www.brendansadventures.com/top-100/](http://www.brendansadventures.com/top-100/)), “Top 100 Travel Blogs” ([www.nomadicsamuel.com/top100travelblogs](http://www.nomadicsamuel.com/top100travelblogs)). Most of the top blogs were present in more than one of these sites. To create the corpus, I explored the blogs listed in these sites and selected those that met the following criteria: (i) most of the posts had a high number of comments (more than twenty); (ii) the posts received comments from commenters with different L1 backgrounds. The commenters’ L1 background was determined through the references to their nationality in the comments and in their own blogs (or *facebook* pages).

Appendix I lists the twelve blogs from which posts have been taken. Ten blogs were written by Anglophone speakers and two by non-Anglophone speakers (a Danish blogger and a Norwegian blogger). However, as pointed out above, all the blogs are used for interaction among speakers from different L1 backgrounds (including English<sup>3</sup>). Two of the bloggers are American expats, who blog not only about their travels, but also about their life in the host country (Spain and Italy). Most of the bloggers give detailed personal information about themselves, e.g. nationality, studies, jobs, reasons for deciding to travel, number of countries they have visited. Except the two expat bloggers, all the other bloggers present themselves as world travelers and adventurers (*I’m a fearless adventurer, currently traveling my way around the world, globe-trotting for almost a decade*) and in the “about” page they all talk about their passion for traveling and about the high number of countries they have visited (*I’ve visited around 80 countries on 6 different continents*). Most of them also present themselves as writers, their writing activity resulting from their desire to share their experiences. They describe their blogs as very different from other types of travel information: places where they share extreme experiences (e.g. being caught in a tsunami) or useful tips. These features are probably the reason why posts in these blogs receive a high number of comments from the travel blogging community.

From each of these blogs a sample of posts was selected following again the criteria of high number of comments and authorship of the comments: only



comment discussions among speakers from different lingua-cultural backgrounds were selected. I did not select the same number of posts and comments from each blog because of the variability in the length, function and authorship of comments in the different blogs, e.g. in some blogs most comments were short responses intended to show approval, while in others commenters contributed longer comments mostly intended for the exchange of information. In total, 36 posts (with 1,211 comments) were collected.

The study focuses on four strategies that the relevant literature has identified as being used for solidarity, involvement, group cohesion and identity creation: make it normal, backchanneling, code-switching and metacomments (Meierkord, 2000; Hülmbauer, 2007; Cogo & Dewey, 2012; Vettorel, 2014). The first step consisted in a preliminary reading of the corpus to see whether these strategies were present in the data. Then, selected examples were analyzed qualitatively, rather than in quantitative terms. Hülmbauer (2007) and Vettorel (2014) argue that a qualitative approach appears particularly appropriate to study the communicative processes taking place in ELF interactions, since this approach can reveal tendencies and unconventional ways to reach communicative goals even in small corpora. Rather than quantifying, my purpose is, therefore, to show how these strategies are exploited in travel blogs.

## 5. Results

The preliminary analysis of the corpus provided data on the purpose, content and type of language in comments in travel blogs. Many of the comments are clearly intended to establish and strengthen bonds within the community of blogging travelers. Comments to posts were found to be used to thank for the information in the post (*Great info! Thanks for sharing all the details*), wish the other a good time (*Hope you have a fantastic time in Chiang Mai, Happy travels*), empathize and express shared ground and experience (*I agree fully, I can totally relate to this*), compliment on the post and express approval (e.g. *wow, great post, awesome pics, this is superinteresting*), tell about personal experiences and feelings, and ask for and give advice. Despite the variety in the function of comments, the underlying purpose is always sharing, collaboration and group maintenance. That is why the language style is very personal and informal and displays all the features that are used in other types of blogs to express involvement and solidarity, e.g. emoticons, ellipsis,

features of oral discourse (Luzón, 2011). The following examples illustrate some of the functions listed above and the kind of language related to these functions:

- (1) C: Hi Earl, I will be flying round trip to Bucharest (alone) on November 23 for 1 week and was wondering if you could comment on my itinerary. (*Wanderingearl*)
- (2) C: Hi Jodi, what beautiful photos! Thank you for posting, I'm currently planning a trip to Japan with my husband in June. Takayama wasn't on our radar at all and now I'm anticipating visiting there the most! Just one question, which ryokan did you stay at there? Thanks so much! (*Legal nomads*)

Example (1) shows how travelers use blogs to get very specific information from reliable and personal sources. Example (2) includes some of the typical moves in comments: showing approval, thanking the blogger, telling the blogger that the post has persuaded him/her to visit a place, and asking questions. Both examples suggest a personal, in-group relation between interactants, with the use of names to address each other.

In the remaining of this section I will discuss the four strategies on which this research focused: make it normal, backchanneling, code-switching and metacomments.

### 5.1. Make it normal

Colloquial and informal language and non-standard forms were frequent in the travel blogs analyzed (example 3). This is not necessarily the result of the use of ELF, since non-standard orthography and syntax are characteristic of computer-mediated communication (Herring, 2012a).

- (3) C: Hey Brendan,  
My Girlfriend and I are looking for our next backpacking destination, *were* really *interested* in *south america* but *dont* know exactly where at the moment.  
  
A friend of ours told us that Argentina is one of the greatest place and one of the cheapest as well, but we *dont* know how much *should we save up* for that trip (...) thank you for replying and have a nice day (*Brendan Adventures*).

Some non-standard grammatical forms seem to be the result of loosened grammatical norms and occur both in comments by native and non-native speakers, e.g. apostrophe omission (e.g. *your* or *its* instead of *you're* or *it's*), apostrophe inclusion (*you're* instead of *your*), lower case pronoun *i*. However, there are also many other non-standard forms that seem to result from the commenter's level of proficiency (example 4).

(4) B: when it happens it is always a good idea to look around *for see if* you can find the bag (...)

C: Wow, I don't know what I would do in this situation and you sounded so calm. I *would had been* shaking all over in panic. Good luck with your travels.

B: Hi Yinglan. I think *that if I did not know* that the situation was just temporary I would have been more in a panic-mood (*Places, people, stories*)

When participants use what prescriptivists would consider grammar mistakes or errors, co-participants do not seem to be concerned with language correctness. Both the blogger and the other commenters reply without making any reference to the “errors”. Example (4) presents some comments from a long discussion, triggered by the post “When you are stuck abroad alone without money”, where both native and non-native speakers of English participate. The blogger (B) and some commenters use some infelicitous forms, but the conversation keeps flowing, with the participants focusing on the message and not on language proficiency. This is consistent with research showing that even when participants in ELF interactions produce non-standard linguistic forms, the speakers are willing to accept their less proficient interlocutors' English and adapt to it (Haegeman, 2002; Hülmbauer, 2007; Firth, 2009a). None of the participants in the discussions in the blog corpus presents himself/herself as learners and none of them (not even the native speakers) adopts the role of language expert: they are peer travelers and the focus is on the message and on maintaining the community through the sharing of experiences. Firth (2009a) reports similar findings in his study of work-related ELF interactions. The interactions contain many examples of non-standard language use, but the language proficiency of the participants (low or high) is not topicalized or commented on, attention being focused on accomplishing expedient business goals and “maintaining convivial ‘business’ relationships” (Firth, 2009a: 149).

## 5.2. Backchanneling

Backchanneling, a common resource in ELF interactions (Meierkord, 2000; Cogo & Dewey, 2012), is very frequent in ELF blog comments to show listenership, i.e. the reader shows that he/she is following the blog and is interested in the story.

- (5) C: cool stories mate (sounds uncannily similar to mine!) – sounds like you’ve had an awesome few years! long may in continue.

B: HA! I can imagine. Considering how long we’ve been on the road it would be more strange not to have a few good tales to tell (*Nomadic Samuel*)

- (6) C1: My favorite ice cream is chocolate with salty liquorice sauce, it’s so delicious!

B: Mmmmmm...it is the best!

C2: Wow! What a craving to have at 30,000 feet. \*laugh\* (*Nomadic Samuel*)

As in examples (5) and (6), backchanneling often takes the form of expressions of approval and interest. The language used in example (5) contributes to creating an intimate relationship and reveals the commenter’s and blogger’s desire to show that they are “birds of a feather”, members of the same group, with similar interests and similar experiences to tell. The discussions analyzed displayed a high number of occurrences of some elements characteristic of e-grammar (Herring, 2012a) that function as backchannels: parenthetical metadiscursive devices (*Mmmmmm*, *Wow*), expressions of laughter, including “performative predications” (\*laugh\*), representations of laughter (*babababa*), acronyms such as LOL, or emoticons. Emoticons are especially frequent, to the point that in some discussions most of the comments include an emoticon (e.g. the discussion triggered by the post “An unusual love for Finnish Salmiakki” in *Nomadic Samuel*).

## 5.3. Code-switching

Forty-three comments in the corpus contained examples of code-switching. Code-switching in ELF interactions does not always result from a lack of language knowledge, but it is often a creative way to facilitate intercultural communication, to express a multilingual identity, and to signal solidarity and group membership (Cogo, 2009; Klimpfinger, 2009). There are two different

types of switches: into the speaker's first language and into an LN (a co-participant's L1) (Pözl, 2003; Klimpfinger, 2009). Both types of switches occur in the travel blog discussions analyzed. Examples (7) to (10) illustrate switches into the writer's L1:

- (7) C: If you ever get to this part of Romania, it would be great to meet and show you around! *Pa!* (*Wanderingearl*)
- (8) C: *Marhaba* Samuel! *Shukran* for visiting my blog about my adventures (and misadventures) living & travelling in the Middle East!  
now it's my turn to scour your blog for South East Asia stories (...), *Mashallah* very soon! (*Nomadic Samuel*)
- (9) C: Wow, what a beautiful collection of photos. (...) Wonderful! (...) One small note: The Shinto shrine gates are "TORII" with two i's, not one; "TORI" with one i refers to birds. It would be great if you could fix that; every time I read about a torii gate, I kept thinking about birds. Hehe. Anyway, GREAT post; thank you. And *AKEMASHITE OMEDETOH!!!* (*Legal nomads*)
- (10) My daughter (...) loves the Salmiakki almost as much as her dad (me). Last friday she found my box of salmiakkis, and brought that to me and said "*auttaa*" (means help in finnish) and wanted me to open it. (*Nomadic Samuel*)

In this corpus the most common types of switches are speech acts (e.g. thanking), greetings and interjections, as illustrated in examples (7) to (9). Many of them are what Klimpfinger (2009) calls "emblematic switches": tags, exclamations or parentheticals from a language other than English placed in the ELF utterance. For instance, in example (7) the commenter uses *Pa* [Bye] to express solidarity and make the blogger feel welcome to Romania. Example (8) presents a comment by a blogger that in her own blog writes in Taglish<sup>5</sup>. In the example there are three switches: *Marhaba* [Welcome], *Shukran* [Thanks] and *Mashallah* (an Arabic word used to show appreciation and praise, and to remind that everything is achieved by the will of Allah). The commenter's switches to Arabic show her desire to signal her multicultural identity. This is a clear example of what Pözl (2003) refers to as "culture laden" switches, which export cultural concepts into the ELF community. In addition, the Arabic words evoke qualities such as exoticism and authenticity, which are key concepts in tourism communication (Jaworski et al., 2004; Cappelli, 2013). This helps to construct the commenter's own blog as an exotic place and thus encourage readers to visit it.

In example (9) the switch is one of the devices used by the commenter to convey solidarity and thus mitigate a possibly face-threatening act. After asking the blogger to correct a spelling mistake, which has cultural relevance, the commenter resorts to laughter (*Hehe*), expressions of approval and thanking and code-switching – *AKEMASHITE OMEDETOH* [Happy New Year] – to convey intimacy and make up for the correction. The emblematic switch into Japanese acts as an invitation for the addressee (a traveler in Japan) to share the commenter’s culture and to co-construct an interculture. In example (10) the switch helps to depict a scene from a distinctly Finnish cultural landscape and thus show the commenter’s loyalty to his lingua-culture. All these examples of switches into the commenter’s own L1 illustrate how code-switching creates a multilingual identity, with English being used to emphasize the commenters’ cosmopolitan face and the L1 their ethno-linguistic face (O’Driscoll, 2001).

Interestingly, although in spoken ELF interactions the speakers who switch into their L1 sometimes translate the expression into English to make sure that their interlocutors understand (Pözl, 2003), in the comments analyzed in this study switches into L1 were not translated into English (except in two occurrences; see example 10), not even in the cases where the commenter could assume that the blogger or the other commenters were not fluent enough to understand the original. The fact that the blog discussions are not synchronous communication, and that, therefore, readers can look up the meaning of the switches if they do not understand, may account for this absence of translation. In addition, this absence may reflect the commenter’s involvement in a process of inter-culture construction (Klimpfinger, 2007). Instead of translating cultural concepts unfamiliar for the readers, the commenter invites the reader to accept them as part of the inter-culture that is being co-created in this particular ELF situation and thus the switch serves to construct group-solidarity.

In the corpus there are also switches into an LN, used as a way to signal rapport and act politely.

(11) Post: Romania Road Trip

C: Hey Earl! I’ve been following your blog for years now and actually posted a comment right before you first came to Romania (...)

B: *Salut* Ilinca – Ha, that’s funny...small world (*Wanderingearl*)

(12) C: As a Romanian part of the desperation that wrapped us up and

quickly united us (...) to beat the corrupted system against all odds, thank you for genuinely understanding what happened and how much it meant for all of us.

B: Hey Elena – *Multumesc* for sharing your thoughts here!  
(*Wanderingearl*)

(13) C: Hi Brendan!

I am Argentinean living in the US (...) what would you say would be a daily budget for Patagonia? (...)

B: *Hola* Angie, *como estas!*

Paraguay is much cheaper (...)

C: *Hola* Brendan!

I think you may have misread my comment *jajaja*, I am visiting Patagonia, not Paraguay

B: *Ayyy Dios*. I swear I'm not drunk (*Brendan Adventures*).

In examples (11) and (12) the blogger uses the LN to greet and thank his interlocutors in their own language, the switch serving to instantiate his polite face (O'Driscoll, 2001). Example (12) consists of one comment to the blogger's post on presidential elections in Romania (C) and the blogger's answer (B). The commenter thanks the blogger for understanding the situation in Romania and the commenter responds with a switch into Romanian to express his solidarity with and closeness to the Romanian people. In example (13) both the blogger and the commenter switch into Spanish, the commenter's L1. After the blogger has switched into Spanish to accommodate to her Argentinian interlocutor and show rapport, the commenter also switches into Spanish to acknowledge the blogger's appreciation of her L1: even the verbal expression of laugh is in Spanish (*jajajaja*). These "responsive switches", which are also found in the blog data analyzed by Vettorel (2014), contribute to creating an intimate atmosphere and an affective shared space, where participants can engage in friendly talk about common interests.

Some interesting examples of code-switching occur in blogs by expat Anglophone speakers who switch into the language of the country where they live. Example (14) shows a fragment of a post by an American expat in Spain and a comment by a Spanish speaker:

- (14) **Post:** “Breaking: Expat Blogger Goes on the Lam After Spaniards Threaten to Eat Her Newborn”

### Fragments from post

I just couldn’t believe it! My mother-in-law threatened to ‘*comersela*’ as soon as she saw the poor baby! (...)

\*Blog may be on hiatus for a bit, *cariños*. I got bigger *cagadas* to fry these days.

### Comment

C1 (Spanish speaker): *Ja, ja, ja*, very good post, a very sharp satire, you know, the Spaniards like us *pezqueñines*, *angulas*, *chanquetes*, *cochinillo*, *cordero lechal*. Keep your little princess away from the jaws of family, friends, acquaintances and passers. And especially, congratulations to the parents and welcome to the *princesita*.

B: *Muchisimas Gracias*, Jesús! (*Passthebam*)

In this example, the blogger does not present herself as a traveler but as an expat, writing probably for compatriots and for friends in the host country (Spain). She makes reference, ironically, to the Spanish use of the verb *comer* [to eat] to express affection for babies. *Estar para comérselo/la* is used to express that a baby is cute. Although the switch *comérsela* helps to establish a boundary between the expat community and the Spanish hosts, with the expats sharing similar experiences with the local language, the humorous and ironical mood of the post suggests that the switch has an empathetic and affective social function *vis-à-vis* Spanish speakers. There are other switches that reflect the blogger’s intention to indicate a special bond to the Spanish culture and create an intimate relationship with her Spanish readers: *cariños* is an expression of affection and *cagadas* makes reference to her baby’s poo. The commenter’s switches into his L1 to make reference to the Spanish culture: *pezqueñines*, *angulas*, *chanquetes*, *cochinillo*, *cordero lechal* are typical Spanish dishes consisting of baby animals. *Princesita* is an affectionate term to refer to little girls, used here by the Spanish speaker to emphasize the welcome to the Spanish culture. The blogger answers back with a new switch into Spanish to reinforce her affiliation to the Spanish lingua-culture.

Examples (15) and (16) belong to another blog by an American expat in Italy. In the blog she often switches into Italian to index her bicultural identity. Most of the switches are greetings or isolated words or phrases, used to



connect with her Italian readers, who also code-switch, but there are also fragments where English and Italian alternate (e.g. example 16).

(15) C: *Ma che brand!* Great post as usual. (...)

I hope you have fun too. Best wishes for 2015. *Ciao bella.*

B: Ha, ha, ha...I LOVE how you got hubbie a pair too! (...) *Buon Anno (Vinovitaviaggi)*

(16) C: I have read your article 4 times already and can't get enough! It's so sweet the way your are talking about our *caffè* that is almost touching! (...) but *moka* is the very first thing I put in my suitcase every time I move out, because I just can't get up from the bed if I know that *my caffè* is not there .....

What about all the other variants to those "normal" orders? What about all those long structured names, like *un caffè macchiato freddo in tazza grande?* :)

B. Hi Silvy!!!! *Sei proprio carina....mi fai ridere!* you packed the *moka!* ha ha, ha...*sei fantastica! Poi...bai ragione....*I have a friend who always ordered: "*caffè d'orzo – tazza grande*" ha, ha, ha.... *Buona Domenica!* (*Vinovitaviaggi*)

In example (15) the commenter is an Italian expat in England, so the code-switching on both parts is used to indicate that they belong to the same group, sharing an Anglophone/Italian culture. In example (16) the commenter uses code-switching to emphasize her ethnolinguistic face by referring to concepts related to the Italian culture (*our caffè, moka, caffè macchiato freddo in tazza grande*), which are shared and understood by the interlocutors. The blogger answers by alternating the two languages in order to emphasize her bicultural identity and signal her strong bond to the Italian culture: this is a clear example of the use of code-switching as an indicator of strong integration into a culture and not the result of deficient knowledge of the language.

In addition to code-switching, participants in blogs also indicate solidarity and belonging to the community of ELF users by using English to refer explicitly to aspects of their own culture and nationality (examples 17 to 20). The references help the speakers construct their bi-cultural identities and their belonging to a community of cosmopolitan travelers who interact in English but may belong to other lingua cultures:

(17) You can take an Asian out of the country, but you can't take the Asian out of us. What can I say, I need my soy sauce (*Gqtrippin*)

- (18) Thanks for warming my Finnish heart. (*Nomadic Samuel*)
- (19) Hope you enjoy Portugal, my country! (*Legal nomads*)
- (20) B: Woah! Never even heard about Salmiakki coffee. Oh, the ice cream was one of my favs
- C: They serve salmiakki coffee in the Salmiakkikioski
- B: That gives me a great reason to go back when I'm in Helsinki again (*Nomadic Samuel*)

The travel blogs in the corpus are platforms for interaction among members from different lingua-cultures, who have the opportunity to share aspects related to their primary culture with other members of the travel blogging community. Example (20) is interesting because the cultural reference (*Salmiakkikioski*, with no further explanation) could be an attempt to signal in-grouping with the participants in the interaction, by establishing social boundaries between travel bloggers (who are already familiar with or have a genuine interest in aspects of the local culture) and tourists.

#### 5.4. Metacomments

In the corpus analyzed there were only three comments on the use of language or the interactants' communicative behaviour (examples 22 to 24), although this scarcity of comments may be due to the small size of the corpus.

- (21) B: I just couldn't believe it! My mother-in-law threatened to 'comersela' as soon as she saw the poor baby! (...)
- C: (Anglophone speaker) Ah, the literal Spanish! (...). *Enborabuena* on the baby (...) (*Passthebam*)
- (22) One small note: The Shinto shrine gates are "TORII" with two i's, not one; "TORI" with one i refers to birds (...) every time I read about a torii gate, I kept thinking about birds (*Legal nomads*)
- (23) Just one minor correction. Although salmiakki is also known as "salty liquorice", it's not actually a kind of liquorice. Salmiakki is ammonium chloride (*Nomadic Samuel*)

Unlike in the corpus of blogs analyzed by Vettorel (2014), none of the participants in the travel blogs commented on their (lack of) proficiency or on their status as non-native speakers. However, one of the commenters

wrote the following statement in her self-presentation in her own blog (*Leandra aventurera* blog), written in Taglish: *Writes from the heart, in my imperfect Taglish. So please don't call the grammar police. :)*. She ironically conceptualizes “Taglish” as imperfect, but this is the language she identifies with and claims the right to use this language for communication. In example (21) an English native speaker sighs *Ah, the literal Spanish!* after the blogger’s anecdote about how some metaphorical meanings of Spanish words may be difficult to understand for English speakers. The ironic comment and the subsequent switch into Spanish illustrate the complexity of expats’ identity. They simultaneously signal in-grouping of expats in Spain and suggest the bonding of the expats in this interaction with the Spanish lingua-culture. In examples (22) and (23) the non-Anglophone commenters correct the use of their L1 by another participant or clarify aspects related to their primary culture, in both cases mitigating face threat (*one small note, minor correction*) and suggesting that this is a common error (*every time I read about a torii gate, also known as ‘salty liquorice’*). The comment in example (23) is triggered because both the blogger and the commenters (Finnish and non-Finnish) refer to *salmiakki* as “liquorice” and one of them as “salty liquorice”. Through comments (22) and (23) the writers express a loyalty to their culture, and emphasize their ethnolinguistic face, while inviting the others to share “insider cultural knowledge”.

## 6. Conclusions

This paper has analyzed four ELF strategies used by participants in travel blog discussions. The analysis has revealed that participants in these blog interactions resort to several strategies to support interaction, show listenership and rapport, construct solidarity and signal affiliation as members of the community of travel bloggers. The make it normal and backchanneling strategies are typical of ELF contexts, but they are also promoted by the supportive and collaborative nature of the blog genre: this is an open space where people from different places can share information, thoughts and experiences.

The make it normal strategy and the lack of comments on the participants’ use of English reveal the norms negotiated within the community of travel bloggers. English is a linguistic resource owned by the community to achieve two goals: construct and maintain relations within the virtual community,

and share within the community. Proficiency in English does not seem to be an issue of discussion, and the members of the community do not perform the role of English language experts or learners, but of peer travelers. As in Firth's (2009b) study, achieving the interactional goals of the community somehow requires deflecting attention away from language proficiency.

Code-switching is clearly triggered by the ELF context: travel blogs provide a space where speakers with different lingua-cultures meet and can switch between languages, thus engaging in a dynamic process of identity creation. Blog participants use their plurilingual resources to express their multilingual identity, show their belonging to an international community of travel bloggers, and, in the case of switches into an LN, express rapport to a culture different from their own.

## Acknowledgements

This research has been carried out within the national research project FFI2012-37346 (Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness) and the project H21 (Gobierno de Aragón and European Social Fund).

Article history:

Received 6 April 2015

Received in revised form 20 August 2015

Accepted 16 December 2015

## References

- Akehurst, G. (2009). "User generated content: The use of blogs for tourism organisations and tourism consumers". *Service Business* 3: 51-61.
- Luzón, M.J. (2011). "'Interesting post, but I disagree': Social presence and antisocial behaviour in academic weblogs". *Applied Linguistics* 32,5: 517-540.
- Blood, R. (2002). *The Weblog Handbook: Practical Advice on Creating and Maintaining Your Blog*. Cambridge: Perseus Publications.
- Cappelli, G. (2013). "Travelling words: Languaging in English tourism discourse" in S. Villani & A. Yarrington (eds.), *Travels and Translations*, 353-374. Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi.
- Cogo, A. (2009). "Accommodating difference in ELF conversations" in A. Mauranen & E. Ranta (eds.), *English as a Lingua Franca: Studies and Findings*, 254-273. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press.
- Cogo, A. (2010). "Strategic use and perceptions of English as a Lingua Franca". *Poznań Studies in Contemporary Linguistics* 46,3: 295-312
- Cogo, A. & M. Dewey (2012). *Analysing English as a Lingua Franca: A Corpus-based Investigation*. London: Continuum.
- Firth, A. (1996). "The discursive accomplishment of normality: On 'lingua franca' English and conversation analysis". *Journal of Pragmatics* 26: 237-259.
- Firth, A. (2009a). "Doing not being a foreign language learner: English as a lingua franca in the workplace and (some) implications for SLA". *IRAL* 47: 127-156.
- Firth, A. (2009b). "The lingua franca factor". *Intercultural Pragmatics* 6: 147-170.

- Goethals, P. (2013). "Los diarios de viaje escritos por particulares: Un estudio exploratorio de un género turístico". *Ibérica* 25: 147-169.
- Goethals, P. (2015). "Traveling through languages: Reports on language experiences in tourists' travel blogs". *Multilingua* 34: 347-372.
- Haegeman, P. (2002). "Foreigner talk in lingua franca business telephone calls" in K. Knapp & C. Meierkord (eds.), *Lingua Franca Communication*, 135-162. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Herring, S. (2012a). "Grammar and electronic communication" in C. Chapelle (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*, 2338-2346. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Herring, S. (2012b). "Discourse in Web 2.0: Familiar, reconfigured, and emergent" in D. Tannen & A. Trester (eds.), *Discourse 2.0: Language and New Media*, 1-25. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- House, J. (2003). "English as a lingua franca: A threat to multilingualism?" *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 7: 556-578.
- Hülmbauer, C. (2007). "'You moved, aren't?' – The relationship between lexicogrammatical correctness and communicative effectiveness in English as a lingua franca". *Vienna English Working Papers* 16: 3-35.
- Jaworski, A., C. Thurlow, S. Lawson & V. YlännemcEwen (2004). "The uses and representations of local languages in tourist destinations: A view from British TV holiday programmes". *Language Awareness* 12: 5-29.
- Kalocsai, K. (2011). *Communities of Practice and English as a Lingua Franca: A study of Erasmus Students in Szeged*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Szeged: University of Szeged.
- Klimpfinger, T. (2009). "'She's mixing the two languages together' – Forms and functions of code-switching in English as a Lingua Franca" in E. Ranta & A. Mauranen (eds.), *English as a Lingua Franca*, 348-371. London: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Lee, Y.J. & U. Gretzel (2014). "Cross-cultural differences in social identity formation through travel blogging". *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing* 31: 37-54.
- Mauranen, A. (2006). "Signaling and preventing misunderstanding in English as lingua franca communication". *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 177: 123-150.
- Meierkord, C. (2000). "Interpreting successful lingua franca interaction. An analysis of nonnative-/non-native small talk conversations in English" in K. Pittner & A. Fetzter (eds.), *Neuere Entwicklungen in Der Gesprächsforschung. Sonderausgabe Von Linguistic Online* 5,1. URL: [http://www.linguistikonline.de/1\\_00/MEIERKOR.H.TMÖ](http://www.linguistikonline.de/1_00/MEIERKOR.H.TMÖ) [03/02/15]
- Munar, A. M. (2010). "Technological mediation and user created content in tourism". *CIBEM Working Paper Series*, April, 1-28.
- Myers, G. (2010). *The Discourse of Blogs and Wikis*. London: Continuum.
- O'Driscoll, J. (2001). "A face model of language choice". *Multilingua* 20: 245-268.
- Pitzl, M. L., A. Breiteneder & T. Klimpfinger (2008). "A world of words: Processes of lexical innovation in VOICE". *Vienna English Working Papers* 17,2: 21-46.
- Pözl, U. (2003). "Signalling cultural identity: The use of L1/Ln in ELF". *Vienna English Working Papers* 12,2: 3-23.
- Rampton, B. (1995). *Crossing: Language and Ethnicity among Adolescents*. London: Longman.
- Schmidt, J. (2007). "Blogging practices: An analytical framework". *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12,4: 1409-1427.
- Seidlhofer, B. (2009). "Accommodation and the idiom principle in English as a Lingua Franca". *Intercultural Pragmatics* 6: 195-215.
- Seidlhofer, B. (2011). *Understanding English as a Lingua Franca*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wenger, A. (2008). "Analysis of travel bloggers' characteristics and their communication about Austria as a tourism destination". *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 14,2: 169-176.
- Wu, M.-Y. & P. L. Pearce (2014). "Appraising netnography: Towards insights about new markets in the digital tourist era". *Current Issues in Tourism* 17,5: 463-474.
- Vettorel, P. (2014). *English as a Lingua Franca in Wider Networking. Blogging Practices*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Volo, S. (2010). "Bloggers' reported tourist experiences: Their utility as a tourism data source and their effect on prospective tourists". *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 16,4: 297-311.

**María José Luzón** is Senior Lecturer at the University of Zaragoza, Spain. She holds a PhD in English Philology and has published papers on academic and professional discourse and on language teaching and learning in the field of English for Specific Purposes. Her current research interests include the analysis of online academic genres, especially academic blogs, and the study of ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) in specialized discourses and in online communication.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The term lingua-culture refers to the cultural dimension of language and implies that culture and language are inseparable.

<sup>2</sup> VOICE is a corpus of English as it is spoken by non-native users.

<sup>3</sup> Native speakers are not excluded from ELF communication. ELF is “any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice” (Seidlhofer, 2011: 7).

<sup>4</sup> In the examples, C (C1, C2) refers to comments by readers, B refers to comments by the blogger, i.e. to answers by the blogger to previous comments.

<sup>5</sup> “Taglish” is Tagalog with American terms.

## Appendix I

List of blogs from which posts to make up the corpus have been taken:

Adventurous Miriam (<http://adventurousmiriam.com/>)  
Brendan adventures (<http://www.brendansadventures.com/top-100/>)  
GQtrippin (<http://gqtrippin.com/>)  
Legal nomads (<http://www.legalnomads.com/>)  
Neverendingfootsteps (<http://www.neverendingfootsteps.com/>)  
Nomadic Matt (<http://www.nomadicmatt.com/>)  
Nomadic Samuel (<http://nomadicsamuel.com/>)  
Pass the ham (<http://passtheham.com/>)  
Places, people, stories (<http://www.placespeoplestories.com/>)  
Twenty-something travel (<http://twenty-somethingtravel.com/>)  
Vino vita viaggi (<http://vinovitaviaggi.com/>)  
Wandering Earl (<http://www.wanderingearl.com/>)