

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN BELF

From users' perceptions, corpus and textbook analysis to pedagogical implications

PAOLA VETTOREL, VALERIA FRANCESCHI
UNIVERSITY OF VERONA

Abstract – English as Business Lingua Franca (BELF) has become an important domain of study within ELF research, where strategic competence, in addition to business know-how and multicultural awareness (Louhiala-Salminen, Kankaanranta 2011), is extremely important due to the high-stakes nature of many business interactions. Meaning negotiation through Communication Strategies (CSs) has been shown to contribute to clarity and accuracy as well as to preventing and solving comprehension problems in both oral (Franceschi 2019) and digital (Brunner, Diemer 2019; Caleffi 2019; Ren 2018) interactions. BELF users' own perceptions confirm the importance of an effective use of strategies in addition to knowledge of relevant business practices and of specialized register (Franceschi forthcoming). However, their importance is not reflected in Business English coursebooks, where attention to CSs and their functions is scarce both in terms of raising awareness of the relevance of these strategies and of practicing their use in BELF communication (Franceschi 2018; Vettorel 2019). This paper combines reflection on the state-of-the-art of communication strategies in BELF, their presence – or lack thereof – in current teaching materials and the actions that may be undertaken in order to integrate CSs in Business English training. Exemplifications on how to foster reflection and implement guided and freer activities involving the use of common communication strategies, including clarification, multilingualism and paraphrasing/interpretative summary, are also provided.

Keywords: ELF; BELF; Business English; English Language Teaching.

1. Introduction

Functions, uses and users of English have deeply changed as a consequence of – and in connection with – globalization processes. Most world communication takes place in ELF contexts, with profound repercussions also on traditional conceptualizations of 'English' as a monolithic entity, as well as of its users (Seidlhofer 2011; Sing 2017; Widdowson 2003).

Business and business communication have been greatly impacted by the modifications caused by the global role of the English language. English has indeed largely become the lingua franca of commercial and work interactions, in communicative contexts that are characterised by hybridity,

fluidity and a diversity of linguacultures, combining elements of locality and globality.

English as Business Lingua Franca (BELF) has become an important domain of study within ELF research, where strategic competence, in addition to business know-how and multicultural awareness (Louhiala-Salminen, Kankaanranta 2011), is extremely important due to the high-stakes nature of many business interactions. In BELF contexts, English represents a shared resource, where “Business English users will be languaging, using adaptive communication strategies, such as accommodation, in order to achieve a common communicative and professional goal” (Sing 2017, p. 324). Indeed, meaning negotiation through Communication Strategies (CSs) has been shown to contribute to clarity and accuracy as well as to preventing and solving comprehension problems in both oral (Franceschi 2019) and digital (Brunner, Diemer 2019; Caleffi 2019, forthcoming; Ren 2018) interactions. BELF users’ own perceptions confirm the importance of an effective use of strategies in addition to knowledge of relevant business practices and of specialized register (Franceschi forthcoming). However, their importance is generally not reflected in Business English coursebooks, where attention to CSs and to their functions is scarce both in terms of raising awareness of the relevance they have and of practicing their use in BELF communication (Franceschi 2018; Vettorel 2019).

This paper combines reflection on the state-of-the-art of communication strategies in BELF, their presence – or lack thereof – in current teaching materials and the actions that may be undertaken in order to integrate CSs in Business English training. Main findings from recent research on CSs in BELF in face-to-face business-related interactions (VOICE) and from BELF users’ perceptions, as well as from CS use in digital e-mail interactions, will be reported in the following sections, to be then intersected with research on business ELT coursebooks. The studies briefly illustrated in the following sections were carried out by the Verona research unit working within a national PRIN project.¹ Suggestions and examples to foster reflection and implement guided and freer activities involving the use of communication strategies commonly employed in BELF, including clarification, multilingualism and paraphrasing/interpretative summary, will be provided.

¹ PRIN 2015 Prot. 2015REZ4EZ, “English as a Lingua Franca in domain-specific contexts of intercultural communication: A Cognitive-functional Model for the analysis of ELF accommodation strategies in unequal migration contexts, digital-media virtual environments, and multicultural ELF classrooms”.

2. CSs in the VOICE PO and PB subcorpora

While Communication Strategies in ELF academic settings have been widely investigated, studies on their use in workplace contexts - either in oral or digital communication - have not been as numerous. Studies on professionals' perceptions of English as the language of international business interactions (Ehrenreich 2010; Louhiala-Salminen, Kankaanranta 2011), however, have highlighted the importance of "clarity, brevity, directness and politeness" (Kankaanranta, Louhiala-Salminen 2013, p. 28). In this respect, the authors further underline the role of "strategic skills, such as ability to ask for clarifications, make questions, repeat utterances, and paraphrase" (Kankaanranta, Louhiala-Salminen 2013).

These statements appear to be corroborated by studies carried out on naturally occurring BELF spoken (Franceschi 2019) and written e-mail (Caleffi 2019; Ren 2018) data, as well as by further recent studies on BELF users' perceptions (Franceschi forthcoming). For example, a list of self-initiated and other-initiated strategies, developed on the basis of existing CSs (Dörnyei, Scott 1997) and ELF taxonomies were investigated in oral interactions for meetings and conversations in the Professional Business (PB) and Professional Organizational (PO) subsections of the VOICE corpus, for a total of 291,000 running words. The analysis appears to show that CSs are employed frequently in the data to prevent or solve communication issues. BELF users are aware of both the need for accuracy and clarity in information sharing and of their own status as non-native speakers, which in turn leads them to pay increased attention to potential communication breakdowns and act proactively. In this data self-initiated strategies aimed at enhancing explicitness (such as rephrasing, word-coinage, etc.) are not employed as often as strategies used to solve perceived or actual comprehension issues: requests for repetition, clarification and confirmation seem to be common ways for participants to ensure they have obtained all the correct information. Such requests are indeed almost always attended to, as the data shows very few unattended requests. Those are usually easily justifiable by looking at their context: such requests might not have been heard or not considered relevant enough to the conversation at hand to warrant disrupting the communicative flow to start a clarification sequence.

Research on digital communication, especially e-mail, has also recently been undertaken with the purposes of identifying which CSs are employed in this increasingly common means of international interactions (Caleffi 2019; Ren 2018). Findings show that several strategies are employed in digital business email communication, too, such as requests for clarification and comprehension checks, as well as repetition and interpretative summary.

The exploitation of linguistic resources beyond English from the participants' Individual Multilingual Repertoires (IRM) (Pitzl 2018), and their adaptation to the specificity of communicative contexts, has also been shown to be a useful asset for meaning negotiation in BELF, in addition to other functions (Cogo 2012, 2016a; Franceschi 2017). Indeed, plurilingual competence has recently acquired weight in the current conceptualization of ELF, and its role in BELF has also been investigated, also as a pragmatic strategy that can have the additional function of building rapport.

2.1. Users' perceptions of CSs in BELF interactions

Strategic competence does not only emerge from language use in corpora analysis, but is recognized as a critical aspect for communicative success by professional themselves. Investigations on professionals' perceptions through interviews and questionnaires have highlighted the importance of strategic competence, as well of accuracy and clarity in content, in international business encounters (Ehrenreich 2010; Kankaanranta, Louhiala-Salminen 2013; Louhiala-Salminen, Kankaanranta 2011). A recent study on perceptions and behaviors of BELF users was aimed at identifying which, among a selected number of strategies, are used more frequently in spoken and digital environments. For the 94 respondents in the study, tolerance of others is the most important element for communicative success, alongside CSs use and knowledge of both business practices and specialized registers (Franceschi forthcoming). Results showed that when it came to preference in CS use, the different channel of communication did not affect respondents' choice significantly. Rephrasing with different or easier words appears instead to be a popular strategy to respond to a signal of non-understanding or to a request for clarification, alongside providing an example. Asking for confirmation and comprehension checks are also popular strategies through which participants can verify their own understanding or make sure other participants are following. This suggests that respondents tend to act proactively in their digital and spoken interactions, using CSs to avoid misunderstandings and attending to signs of non-understanding or misunderstanding. Use of rephrasing and providing examples, for instance, can be seen as a "preventative measure" (Franceschi forthcoming) when non-understanding is suspected. In addition, respondents agree in providing what information they consider important for the success of the interaction in advance.

2.2. Recurring elements in the findings from VOICE and users' perceptions' survey

While the questionnaire mentioned above investigated only a number of selected strategies, identified on the basis of previous research - including the aforementioned VOICE studies - results from this data confirm observations from previous research and highlight the importance of proactive and co-operative behavior in the management of international business communication. The let-it-pass strategy of not addressing problematic turns is extremely rare in BELF due to the sensitive nature of the interactions involved, that may result in a loss of company time and money in case of an unresolved misunderstanding. Participants not only tend to address any explicit or perceived communication issues, but adopt strategies, including providing extra information in advance, to prevent such issues from arising. Self-rephrasing, for instance, was not investigated in the survey but it appeared in the VOICE PO and PB subsections as a preventative measure: by making an effort to be as clear as possible, participants try and avoid misunderstandings as well as the need for a repair sequence that may disrupt the interaction. While the survey did not show significant differences in behavior in the use of CSs between oral and digital interactions, it should be noted that the survey measured perceptions, so further research on naturally occurring digital data could shed more light on medium differences in CS use in BELF. It should also be pointed out that CSs do not always have the instrumental purpose of preventing or solving communication breakdown – preliminary investigation in digital interaction via e-mail appears to show that such strategies are also used to build and maintain rapport between interlocutors (Caleffi forthcoming). Indeed, participants seem to be aware of the need for rapport building and face-saving behavior during business encounters, which may result in careful strategic choices (such as rephrasing with different words rather than simplifying the concept) that can ensure communicative success while avoiding potentially offending the interlocutor (Franceschi, forthcoming).

The main overlapping areas for the CSs taken into consideration in our research within – but not only – the PRIN project are summarised in Table 1 below. As can be seen, requests for repetition, clarification and confirmation, as well as comprehension checks and rephrasing/paraphrase emerge as important in all domains, both face-to-face and digital ones. The table also reports findings as to the presence of these CSs in Business ELT coursebooks, which will be dealt with in detail in the following section (cf. also Franceschi 2019; Vettorel 2019).

| Communication Strategies | VOICE (oral) | digital (e-mail) | perceptions (oral) | perception (written digital) | Business ELT coursebooks |
|--|--------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Direct and indirect appeals | ✓ | | | | ✓ |
| signaling non-understanding | | | ✓ | | |
| Request for repetition | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Request for clarification | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Request for confirmation | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Comprehension checks | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Confirmation checks | | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Repetition (response) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Response: (rephrasing, expanding, definition, exemplification, etc.) | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ (only higher levels) |
| paraphrase (including self-rephrase and circumlocution) | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ |

Table 1
Summary of areas investigated and findings.

3. Communication strategies in Business ELT coursebooks

As was seen in the previous sections, CSs play a fundamental role in BELF communication, and their relevance is acknowledged also by professionals who use English as a working language in BELF contexts: a number of CSs that have been identified in BELF research as having a prominent role appear to be considered important for successful communication by professionals, too (Franceschi forthcoming).

Findings from our data, which are in line with other BELF research (Louhiala-Salminen, Kankaanranta 2011), can hence have significant implications for business-related language curricula and for ELT materials. Professional business international relations increasingly occur in contexts that involve speakers from different first languages, different linguacultures,

as well as different work and corporate cultures. In order to prepare students (and professionals) for international communication through English, it appears fundamental for business ELT practices to be informed by BELF research findings, and more particularly to devote adequate attention to the role that CSs play in carrying out BELF communication in an effective way.

Recent investigations on business ELT materials, however, show that a BELF perspective on CSs does not seem to be present/dealt with. Findings from Vettorel's investigation (2019) in elementary, pre-intermediate and intermediate levels business ELT coursebooks shows that, despite the inclusion of some CSs since elementary volumes, these materials do not deal with such strategies in an overt and consistent way, and the importance CSs retain in BELF communication is not addressed. Even when examples of CSs such as repetition, clarification, checking comprehension and paraphrasing are included, a BELF viewpoint is not provided; furthermore, such examples are rarely accompanied by adequate reflection tasks. Similar findings emerged in analogous materials at more advanced levels (Franceschi 2018): despite the inclusion of some awareness-raising activities and opportunities for reflective practice, very few examples were provided for overt reflection, above all as to clarification and confirmation checks. One further aspect to be noted is that not all the CSs employed in face-to-face business-related contexts (Franceschi 2019), as illustrated in the previous sections, seem to be taken into consideration in business ELT materials, as will be seen in the following sections.

Although the inclusion of some CSs can be seen as a positive starting point in didactic terms, several other CSs that have been found to be used either in VOICE business-related data, or in digital communication via e-mail, or in both areas, do not seem to be dealt with in coursebooks, such as for instance lexical anticipation in response to hesitation, repair after request for confirmation, other-initiated word replacement, or metalinguistic comments. Attention to CSs, that are part of the 'Competence in BELF' layer of the Global Communicative Competence model (GCC, Louhiala-Salminen, Kankaanranta 2011), is not consistent in the materials examined, and the relevance they have for effective communication in BELF is not mentioned. Apart from a few cases (Vettorel 2019), they are often relegated to 'language boxes', very rarely accompanied by awareness-raising activities or connected to active practice in freer, authenticated (BELF) communication contexts. Also the notes in the teachers' guides do not provide advice, resources or examples that could lead to a further exploitation and expansion of the examples within a BELF-aware perspective, nor (apart from one case, see below) do they overtly set CSs within an interactional, active listening framework, where it is the joint work of both speaker(s) and listener(s) that constructs meaning and leads to mutual understanding. In addition, the

plurilingual aspect of (B)ELF communication, which has been shown to be an important communicative and rapport-building resource in BELF communication – both face-to-face and digital - is only very partially and minimally included in business ELT materials, and not present at all for lower levels (Franceschi 2018; Vettorel 2019; cf. also Si 2019). In line with this, other elements that have been widely shown to characterise (B)ELF use, as for instance the ability to creatively exploit the resources of the virtual language (Seidlhofer 2011; Widdowson 2003) in, and for, communication do not seem to be accounted for in business-oriented ELT pedagogic materials. Exemplifications for strategies such as approximation, all-purpose words and word-coinage, for example, that are present also in the VOICE business-related subcorpora were not found in the materials examined. This appears consistent with findings for general ELT materials (Vettorel 2017, 2018), and with the overall observation that an ELF-aware, and ELF-informed, pedagogical approach has not yet been consistently taken into consideration in ELT (Sifakis 2019; Sifakis *et al.* 2018).

It should however also be noted that aspects of the Global Communicative Competence model (Kankaanranta, Louhiala-Salminen 2013; Louhiala-Salminen, Kankaanranta 2011), comprising the three interrelated layers of Multicultural Competence, Competence in BELF and Business Knowledge, have been found to be present in these business ELT materials; the multicultural competence layer, for instance, seems to be dealt with more frequently and more in depth, particularly as to differences in cultural and business cultural practices, or ways of doing business. Along the same line, awareness of Global Englishes in terms of exposure to speakers with a variety of accents also seems to be increasingly present in business ELT materials.

4. Pedagogical implications and examples of activities to foster the development of CSs

Given the extensive role that English as a lingua franca plays internationally, in business as in other domains, the need to take findings from BELF research into account in business-related ELT syllabi, curricula, materials and practices has been set forward by a number of researchers (Kankaanranta *et al.* 2015; Kankaanranta, Louhiala-Salminen 2010, 2013; Pullin 2015; Sing 2017). Besides, several studies point to the importance of including authentic, real-work BELF data (Bremner 2008; Evans 2013; Faltzi, Sougari 2018; Louhiala-Salminen 1996; Nickerson 2002; Planken *et al.* 2004; Poncini 2002, 2004, 2013) in materials and pedagogic practices, one that would foster awareness of BELF interactions, and offer opportunities to experience how the language is actually used for communication in business and work

relations (for a discussion see Sing 2017).

As mentioned in the previous sections, CSs are integral part of the GCC model, and particularly of the second layer, that of Competence in BELF. Besides knowledge of business genres, the ability to manage tasks and build rapport, Competence in BELF includes strategic skills such as the “ability to ask for clarifications, make questions, repeat utterances, and paraphrase” and to effectively employ CSs as “clarity, brevity, directness and politeness” in communication (Kankaanranta, Louhiala-Salminen 2013, p. 28). Within the specificity of business communicative contexts as to discursive practices, genres, know-how and cultural aspects – not least in corporate terms – it is the adaptive and effective use of resources and strategies by BELF users that plays a particularly important role in effective communication. In international business contexts, awareness and tolerance of differences in getting the job done are hence fundamental elements in the processes of active listening, where accommodation, negotiation and co-construction of meaning are realised as a joint enterprise by both speaker(s) and listener(s). Taking account of the relevance of these processes, and of the ways in which they are actually carried out in real-work contexts, ELT business-related materials and classroom/training practices should work towards preparing (future) professionals for international communication through BELF, also in connection to the development of the skills part of BELF Competence as outlined in the GCC model.

In the next sections we will provide some exemplifications of how findings from BELF research on CSs show that they are fruitfully employed in internationally-oriented communication through English, and on how these findings can be applied to business ELT contexts. We will focus particularly on the strategies that emerge as most relevant from our previous research findings, and which were to a certain extent included in the examined business ELT materials. Our aim is to set CSs-related activities within a BELF-informed framework, namely a) requests for repetition/clarification/confirmation and comprehension checks; b) responses in terms of repetition/reformulation (rephrasing, expanding, definition, exemplification), and paraphrase. To this aim, we will include examples both from BELF data (VOICE Professional Business sub-corpus), as well as from class work that was carried out as part of the EPP course *English for the world of work: focus on professional speaking and writing skills* held at the University of Verona.

4.1. Requests for repetition/clarification/confirmation – comprehension checks

Some examples for each category (apart from requests for confirmation) were found in the business ELT materials that were examined. For lower levels, we have 6 examples for asking for repetition, 3 for clarification and 5 for comprehension checks (Vettorel 2019); for the upper-intermediate level, the eight books analyzed showed 11 examples of asking for repetition, 25 of asking for clarification, 26 of asking for confirmation, and 4 comprehension checks (Franceschi 2018). Numbers for the higher level appear to be greater; however, it should be noted that many of these examples were not contextualized or marked as Communication Strategies, but rather embedded in activities with a different focus or included in lists of selected key expressions; furthermore, only three books out of eight display any systematic attention to building skills in Communication Strategy use.

Generally, it can be said that coursebook materials include a list of selected key expressions that can be employed to ask for repetition and clarification, such as “Can you repeat ...?”, “Sorry, what did you say?”, “Can you say that again?”. In most cases, brief listening examples are followed by a few guided practice exercises, and sometimes by freer practice ones, generally in connection to the main topic of the unit. Even though, especially for lower proficiency levels, these activities and a recap of useful expressions are certainly important, the relevance these and other pragmatic moves have in (BELF) communication is not pointed to, nor are instances of/for ‘natural’ contextualization offered. Within a BELF-informed perspective, on the other hand, presenting examples of actual language usage from corpora would provide opportunities first of all to raise awareness of how they are employed through noticing tasks. Such contextualised exemplifications could then be used as a springboard for active practice, both in business-related contexts, and through task-based projects in connection to (simulated) real-work contexts (Pullin 2010, 2015). The extract below, drawn from an international meeting in the PB subsection of the VOICE corpus, would for instance represent a useful example to show students a very effective use of Communication Strategies for handling communication problems. The authenticity of the example adds to its value, as it shows how meaning negotiation through CSs use occurs in actual high-stakes workplace interactions.

Extract 1

1454 S1: again e:r the major contributio- -butor. (1) in terms of (.) e:r value (.) e:r among our sales (.) OUTLET (.) ARE (.) those two. so HYPERMARKET and general trade.

- 1455 S4: mhm
 1456 S1: with er thirty-seven and (1) thirty-one per cent. (2)
 1457 S4: <slow> general trade? er (1) you sell DIRECTLY to or
 wholesalers o:r </slow>
 1458 S2: wholesalers
 1459 S4: <3> to er </3>
 1460 S1: <3> wholesalers </3>
 1461 S2: to wholesaler (.)
 1462 S4: mhm (3)
 (VOICE PBmtg3)

In this extract we see a clear example of asking for clarification, followed by an expansion to distinguish the request for clarification from a request for confirmation. As S4 does not understand what S1 intends with *general trade*, he asks for clarification by repeating the trigger word and, after a pause, enhances the explicitness of the request by formulating a more detailed query. The stress on the word *directly* could also have a pragmatic meaning, as S4 may want to know if the sales are direct or involve any intermediaries. This example ties Communication Strategies – and therefore BELF competence, which includes linguistic knowledge of business genres – to another aspect of GCC, that is, Business know-how. As different business settings may involve different procedures or attribute different meanings to the same business words / expressions, here S4 appears to want to make sure that both parties are on the same page regarding the meaning of *general trade*. This example therefore highlights the need for accuracy and clarity in BELF and how they can be effectively achieved through strategic language use, ensuring mutual comprehension and communicative success, and could hence constitute an excellent exemplification of how naturally occurring data can be employed to raise awareness of communication strategies in BELF.

An attempt in this direction was made in the EPP *English for the world of work: focus on professional speaking and writing skills*, held at the University of Verona and aiming at providing participants with a range of transversal skills to be used in the workplace. During the course, work on how a selected range of CSs, including requests for clarification and comprehension checks, can work in effective communication was provided. The following activity, employed in the 2017 and 2018 edition, for instance, exemplifies how participants can first learn how to identify CSs in a model text, raising awareness of their use and functions in communication, and then put their new knowledge and skill to practice through a production task. First, participants were asked to carry out an activity to identify a series of selected strategies, followed by a guided task where they had to think of different expressions to introduce different strategies (request for clarification or confirmation, comprehension check, response with rephrasing). Then, they worked in pairs, talking in turns about their work if they were professionals,

or their university experience if they were still students. Each pair was given action cards (see Fig. 1), that they needed to use during their conversation. The activity ended after both trainees had used all their cards, then they exchanged roles and repeated the exercise.

| | | |
|--|---|--------------------------|
| The person being explained to | | |
| Show your lack of understanding (general) | Point out (exactly) what you don't understand | Check your comprehension |
| the person explaining | | |
| Check the other person's understanding (general) | Check the other person's understanding (specific) | Add more information |

Figure 1
Cards for the Communication Strategies activity.

The examples of activities suggested above would provide students with both an authentic model of CSs use, which would contribute to building awareness of CSs and their importance in day-to-day international workplace communication, as well as give them a chance to practice such strategies in simulated encounters.

4.2. Responses: repetition/reformulation (rephrasing, expanding, definition, exemplification); paraphrase

Communication strategies referring to repetition, reformulation and paraphrase also appear to be widely present in our data, as in BELF literature. Repetition, reformulation and rephrasing are frequently employed by BELF users to cooperatively reach mutual understanding, in a face-saving and natural way (Franceschi 2019 for VOICE data), and seems to be corroborated also by findings from BELF users' perceptions. While this is also true for more general ELF contexts, it appears to be even more important in BELF due to the high-stake nature of business-related interactions. Reaching mutual understanding and conveying correctness in content indeed constitute paramount goals (Louhiala-Salminen, Kankaanranta 2011; Palmer-Silveira 2013).

Findings from coursebooks in this area include some interesting exemplifications, particularly for paraphrasing, that is at times presented in combination with other CSs such as comprehension checks or interpretative summary. For example, in one case, within the regular *Communication Strategies* section in the coursebook, in the elementary volume we find a

“What do you call it?” heading with a series of activities (Barral, Rogers 2011, p. 78). It is worth of note that the activities are introduced by a discussion task where students are first asked to talk in pairs about what they do when they don't know, or cannot recall, a word in their L1, and then about whether they do the same in a conversation in English. The request to reflect on the strategies normally used in their L1 appears particularly interesting, since it can lead to overt reflection on the fact that CSs are part of ‘normal pragmatic practice’ (Widdowson 2003) in any language, as well as to the idea that ‘perfect communication’ is a problematic conceptualization, either in a first or in a second/additional language (Pitzl 2010). Within a Multilingua Franca perspective, the aforementioned coursebook activity could be integrated by overt reflection tasks including other languages part of the students'/trainees' repertoires, too – as literature has shown, the use of languages other than English in BELF is a widespread practice (Cogo 2012, 2016a, 2016b; Franceschi 2017; Poncini 2003), to the aim of meaning negotiation, but also a means to create and maintain rapport, especially when it involves the language(s) in the partners' repertoires (Franceschi 2017; Louhiala-Salminen, Kankaanranta 2011).

In didactic terms, extracts from the VOICE PB subcorpus could also be used to exemplify how the participants' plurilingual resources are naturally integrated in BELF communication, as for instance in the following extract:

Extract 2

2056 S1: i will go for this one i don't know this plate. (1)
 2057 S2: m<6>hm </6> (1)
 2058 S1: <6> (it) </6>
 2059 S7: (no) things (3)
 2060 S2: <LNfre> bon appetit? {enjoy your meal} </LNfre> (2)
 2061 SX-m: <soft><un> x?</un></soft>
 2062 S6: <LNfre> bon appetit {enjoy your meal} </LNfre> (5)
 (VOICE PBmtg300)

This conversation takes place at lunch time, during which the meeting among the participants continues. As they settle in front of their meals, two of them use the French expression *bon appetit* despite none of them being a native French speaker. In this case, we can say that French fills a linguistic and conceptual gap in English: as there is no conventional expression to wish people a good meal as in other European languages, speakers here rely on a common French phrase to convey their message. This choice allows them to express a meaning that could not have been immediately communicated in English as well as reinforce a social bond between the participants.

In the example from the elementary coursebook quoted above (Barral, Rogers 2011, p. 78), the reflection point about strategies the students are

familiar with in their L1 and in English is followed by a series of tasks specifically related to paraphrasing and direct appeal in the form of sentence completion, matching, guided and freer practice. It should be noted that in this case the suggestions in the general introduction of the Teacher's Book set CSs within an interactional rather than a deficit perspective; in the section related to the aforementioned activities, noticing for paraphrasing techniques is encouraged, and a reference to repairing strategies is made: "at elementary level Ss [students] often struggle to find the right word. This lesson gives the Ss strategies for when they don't know a word or can't remember a word in English. They are taught how they can still remain fluent in the conversation despite not knowing a particular word by using paraphrasing language" (Alexander 2011, p. 81). On the whole, these activities could represent a good starting point that could be applied in several other teaching/learning contexts, in order to foster first awareness and then practice of paraphrasing to pre-empt or solve a potential non-understanding.

Another example worth mentioning in relation to paraphrasing in the coursebooks examined is one that is directly connected to listening in an active way, which is the main topic of the unit in another textbook. The relevance of "paraphrasing regularly to show you're paying attention" is mentioned, alongside the importance of seeking "further information, probe with questions" and "clarify any points which are unclear to you" (Powell 2014, p. 27). The 5-point list "L.I.S.T.E.N." ("Look interested, Inquire, Summarize, Test understanding, Encourage", *ibid.*) for good listeners is followed by a listening exercise and a noticing activity, which include the following expressions to be identified in the proposed listening passage:

So what you are saying is...; It sounds like you think...; In other words...; Are you saying...?; so the way you see it is...; so, for you it's a question of...

Are you saying...?; Do you mean...?; What do you mean by...?; Sorry, I'm not quite with you; How do you mean exactly?

Uh huh, go on.; really?; Oh, that's interesting; Right, I'm with you. Good point; Hmm, nice idea. I like it.

How is that going to affect...?; But wouldn't that mean...?; Why do you say that?: Do you have figures for that?; Okay, fine. Just one question (*ibid.*)

Students are then asked to practice active listening techniques following the guidelines provided in two short written texts. Importantly, it can be noted that the expressions above are set within a cooperative meaning co-construction, either to show interest (building rapport) or as interpretative summary/asking for more details and explanations. The positive point here can be seen above all in the rationale of setting these CSs within an active

listening viewpoint, highlighting how meaning co-construction and effective communication are a joint enterprise reached through cooperation of both speaker and listener (cf. also Chan, Frendo 2014; Chong 2018 for other activities). In this case, too, including real-work exemplifications of how these CSs are used in BELF contexts would provide further opportunities for reflection and examples for real use, as for instance the following conversation from VOICE.

Extract 3

- 138 S5: <slow> i think </slow> probably the goal is of course for all of us to have true: joint degrees. but at the moment (.) in order to be able to do something (.) we need to (1) i think in most of the cases double degrees or triple degrees (.) is the solution so (.) i think at the <loud> same time </loud> (.) as we are <fast> sort of </fast> trying to promote (.) THIS type of curriculum convergence (.) of operation (.) e:r [org2] can (1) <slow> as i think </slow> it has always DONE (.) act as a as a: lobbying
- 139 S1: <soft> mhm </soft> =
- 140 S5: = er <2> machinery </2><3> towards </3>
- 141 S8: <2> mhm </2>
- 142 S1: <2><soft> mhm </soft></2>
- 143 S8: <3> mhm </3> hm
- 144 S5: whatever <4> instance </4> is (at need) (1)
- 145 S1: <4><soft> mhm </soft></4>
- 146 S8: hm =
- 147 S1: = okay so our (.) ULTimate aim is to (.) establish joint degrees (.) joint degree programs.
- 148: S5: <5> mhm </5>
- (VOICE, POmtg314)

In this example, S1 and S8 show active listening by using repeatedly the backchannel *mhm*, which in this context can have the functions of signaling attention and comprehension as well as of encouraging S5 to continue his explanation. Once S5 appears to have concluded his turn, with a pause at the end of the utterance (line 144), S1 summarizes the kernel of S5's speech. Even though S1's turn is not phrased as a question, she is reformulating what she has heard to make sure she has understood correctly. S5's own backchannel may be interpreted as agreement with S1's summary.

The examples discussed above can hence represent relevant didactic opportunities to notice how CSs are effectively and naturally used in real BELF contexts and could be employed as a springboard for further practice, both guided and freer, also in similar work-related settings. Other activities that can be used to develop paraphrasing skills, and which are generally well-received by students, include for example tasks where students are asked to define a word, as in the popular game *Taboo*. A game of this type was used in

the EPP *English for the World of Work* as part of the language focus on strategies, and was planned with workplace vocabulary after the activities on asking and providing clarification illustrated above. The game was played in pairs or in small teams; in turns, participants picked a card and illustrated its meaning to their teammates, who had to guess the word on the card. This type of activity, which is often also used to reinforce and review vocabulary, is very adaptable, as it can be played at different levels of difficulty and with different types of words.

To sum up, fostering awareness of natural CS use in BELF context within business-related ELT appears of the utmost importance, given the relevance they have in effective communication in the international workplace. Such awareness can be promoted through noticing activities based on BELF data, implementing and integrating coursebooks materials with overt noticing and reflection tasks, as we sought to exemplify. Such tasks should also include the students' experience of their L1, of English, and of other languages part of their repertoires, within a 'lingual capability' perspective whereby all resources in the speakers' repertoires are used in communication. Such an approach can first lead to awareness of the crucial role CSs play in BELF, and in turn to active practice, first guided and then freer, through simulations and/or real work settings.

5. Concluding remarks

The impact of globalization has led to an expanded role of English as the working language of communication in the workplace. Communicative needs in these international business contexts are two-fold: while speakers need to be skilled and engage at a global level, localized elements (in terms of practices, policies, and even linguistic conventions) also play an important role. Participants negotiate their use of linguistic resources, including languages other than English, to find a balance between mutual understanding, rapport building, and saving face – others' and their own – in preventing and resolving potential non-understandings. The research carried out within the PRIN project has further underlined the role of Communication Strategies in BELF interactions, expanding existing research; corpora-based studies, both of face-to-face and e-mail interactions, have shown that CSs are employed skillfully by participants with the primary purpose of preventing and solving communication issues; preliminary investigations suggest that they are also used deliberately for rapport building (Caleffi 2019, forthcoming). The importance of such strategies is also recognized by professionals themselves, who report that misunderstandings, when they happen, are very likely to be quickly and efficiently solved through a range of CSs.

However, such strategies do not appear to be adequately included in business ELT materials either in terms of raising awareness or providing opportunities to develop their skillful use in BELF settings. While examples of common CSs are found in textbooks from beginner to upper-intermediate levels, they are very rarely addressed or built upon as an overt and integrated learning focus, and never within a BELF perspective. Given the relevance CSs have been shown to have in BELF communication, students and trainees would indeed benefit from learning about and practicing different pragmatic strategies, first in a controlled and then in a real work environment. As we have tried to illustrate, additional activities can be created using authentic BELF data to highlight how CSs are actually and effectively used in real interactions, and then integrated with the examples of strategies appearing in textbooks by using them as the starting point for CS-focused tasks.

Further research, especially in digital contexts, is needed to investigate the role and functions of CSs in these interactional contexts, and how their use may inform Business English syllabi and materials in a BELF-aware perspective. Additional work on pedagogical implications is therefore also warranted, through the development and testing of courses and training materials that include a more distinctive focus on success in international work environments, not only in the specific area of CSs but also, more generally, in all the aspects involved in Competence in BELF and in the other layers comprised in the Global Communicative Competence model.

Bionotes: Paola Vettorel is Assistant Professor at the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures – University of Verona. Her main research interests include ELF and its implications in ELT; ELF and digital media. Among her publications: (2014) *English as a Lingua Franca in wider networking. Blogging practices*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter; (2018) *ELF and Communication Strategies: Are they taken into account in ELT materials?*, “RELC Journal” 49 [1]; (2019) *BELF, Communication strategies and ELT business materials*, “Iperstoria”; (2019) *Communication strategies and co-construction of meaning in ELF: Drawing on “Multilingual Resource Pools*, “Journal of English as a Lingua Franca” 8 [2].

Valeria Franceschi is currently a Junior Researcher in English Language and Translation at the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures of the University of Verona. Her main research areas include ELF and plurilingualism; ELF in the business context (BELF). Among her publications on these topics, *Exploring Plurilingualism in Fan Fiction: ELF Users as Creative Writers* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017); *Plurilingual resources as an asset in ELF business interactions*, “Journal of English as a Lingua Franca” 6 [1] (2017). In addition to ELF, her research areas of interest include digital communication and corpus linguistics.

Authors' addresses: paola.vettorel@univr.it; valeria.franceschi@univr.it

Acknowledgements: This paper is supported by the PRIN 2015 Prot. 2015REZ4EZ, “English as a Lingua Franca in domain-specific contexts of intercultural communication: A Cognitive-functional Model for the analysis of ELF accommodation strategies in unequal migration contexts, digital-media virtual environments, and multicultural ELF classrooms”.

References

- Alexander K. 2011. *Lifestyle Elementary - Teacher's Book*. Harlow: Pearson Education/Longman.
- Barral I. and Rogers J. 2011. *Lifestyle Elementary - Coursebook*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Bremner S. 2008, *Intertextuality and business communication textbooks: Why students need more textual support*, in "English for Specific Purposes" 27, pp. 306-321.
- Caleffi P.-M. 2019, *Communication strategies in business email interactions*. Presentation given at the XXIX AIA Conference, University of Padua, 5th-7th September 2019.
- Caleffi P.-M. Forthcoming, *Building rapport in BELF communication: solidarity strategies in business emails*, in "Status Quaestionis".
- Chan C.S.C. and Frendo E. (eds.) 2014, *New ways in teaching business English*, TESOL International Association, Alexandria.
- Chong C.S. 2018, *Successful international communication*, Pavillion Publishing and Media, Hove.
- Cogo A. 2012, *ELF and super-diversity: a case study of ELF: Multilingual practices from a business context*, in "Journal of English as a Lingua Franca" 1 [2], pp. 287-313.
- Cogo A. 2016a, *'They all take the risk and make the effort': Intercultural accommodation and multilingualism in a BELF Community of Practice*, in Lopriore L. and Grazzi G. (eds.), *Intercultural communication: New perspectives from ELF*, Roma Tre-Press, Rome, pp. 365-383.
- Cogo A. 2016b, *Conceptualizing ELF as a translanguaging phenomenon: Covert and overt resources in a transnational workplace*, in "Waseda Working Papers" 5, pp. 1-17.
- Dörnyei Z. and Scott M.L. 1997, *Communication strategies in a second language: definitions and taxonomies*, in "Language Learning" 47 [1], pp. 173-210.
- Ehrenreich S. 2010, *English as a business lingua franca in a German multinational corporation*, in "Journal of Business Communication" 47 [4], pp. 408-431.
- Evans S. 2013, *Designing tasks for the Business English classroom*, in "ELT Journal" 67 [3], pp. 281-293.
- Faltzi R. and Sougari A.-M. 2018, *Accounting for ELF in business-related courses in the post-ELF world: considerations and practices*, in Cavalheiro L. (ed.), *Preparing English language teachers for today's globalized world*, Edições Hùmus, Ribeirão, pp. 237-254.
- Franceschi V. Forthcoming, *Achieving mutual understanding in the global workplace: a questionnaire-based survey of BELF users' perceptions and practices*, in "Status Quaestionis".
- Franceschi V. 2019, *Enhancing explicitness in BELF interactions: self-initiated communication strategies in the workplace*, in "Iperstoria" 13, pp. 59-71.
- Franceschi V. 2018, *Training successful BELF users: Communication strategies in Business English textbooks*, presentation given at "ELF11, 11th International Conference of English as a Lingua Franca", King's College London, 4th-7th July 2018.
- Franceschi V. 2017. *Plurilingual resources as an asset in ELF business interactions*, in "Journal of English as a Lingua Franca" 6 [1], pp. 57-81.
- Kankaanranta A. and Louhiala-Salminen L. 2010, *'English? – Oh, it's just work!': A study of BELF users' perceptions*, in "English for Specific Purposes" 29, pp. 204-209.

- Kankaanranta A. and Louhiala-Salminen L. 2013, 'What language does global business speak?' – *The concept and development of BELF*, in "Ibérica" 26, pp. 17-34.
- Kankaanranta A., Louhiala-Salminen L. and Karhunen P. 2015, *English in multinational companies: Implications for teaching 'English' at an international business school*, in "Journal of English as a Lingua Franca" 4 [1], pp. 125-148.
- Louhiala-Salminen L. 1996, *The business communication classroom vs reality: what should we teach today?*, in "English for Specific Purposes" 15 [1], pp. 37-51.
- Louhiala-Salminen L. and Kankaanranta A. 2011, *Professional communication in a global business context: The notion of global communicative competence*, in "IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication" 54 [3], pp. 244-262.
- Nickerson C. 2002, *Taking an interdisciplinary approach in the analysis of multinational business discourse*, in Candlin C.N. (ed.), *Research and practice in professional discourse*, City University of Hong Kong Press, Hong Kong, pp. 641-662.
- Palmer-Silveira J.C. 2013, *The need for successful communication in intercultural and international business settings: Analytic and comparative studies, New trends and methodologies*, in "Ibérica" 26, pp. 9-16.
- Pitzl M.-L. 2010, *English as a lingua franca in international business. Resolving miscommunication and reaching shared understanding*, VDM-Verlag Müller, Saarbrücken.
- Pitzl M.-L. 2018, *Creativity in English as a Lingua Franca: idiom and metaphor*, De Gruyter Mouton, Berlin/Boston.
- Planke B., van Hoft A. and Korzilius H. 2004, *Promoting intercultural communicative competence through foreign language courses*, in "Business Communication Quarterly" 67, pp. 308-315.
- Poncini G. 2002, *Investigating discourse at business meetings with multicultural participation*, in "International Review of Applied Linguistics" 40, pp. 345-373.
- Poncini G. 2003, *Multicultural business meetings and the role of languages other than English*, in "Journal of Intercultural Studies" 24 [1], pp. 17-32.
- Poncini G. 2004, *Discursive strategies in multicultural business meetings*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt.
- Poncini G. 2013, *Investigating communication and professional communities at international events*, in "Ibérica" 26, pp. 131-150.
- Powell M. 2014. *In company 3.0 - Intermediate Student's Book Pack*. London: MacMillan.
- Pullin P. 2010, *Tasks and English as an international language in academic settings*, in "Babylonia" 3 [10], pp. 45-49.
- Pullin P. 2015, *Culture, curriculum design, syllabus and course development in the light of BELF*, in "Journal of English as a Lingua Franca" 4 [1], pp. 31-53.
- Ren W. 2018, *Pragmatic strategies to solve and preempt understanding problems in Chinese professionals' emails when using English as Lingua Franca communication*, in "International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism" 21 [8], pp. 968-981.
- Seidlhofer B. 2011, *Understanding English as a Lingua Franca*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Si J. 2019, *An analysis of business English coursebooks from an ELF perspective*, in "ELT Journal" 74 [2], pp.156-165.
- Sifakis N.C. 2019. *ELF awareness in English Language Teaching: Principles and processes*, in "Applied Linguistics" 40 [2], pp. 288-306.
- Sifakis N.C., Lopriore L., Dewey M., Bayyurt Y., Vettorel P., Cavalheiro L., Siqueira D. S.P. and Kordia S. 2018, *ELF-awareness in ELT: Bringing together theory and*

- practice*, in “Journal of English as a Lingua Franca” 7 [1], pp. 155-209.
- Sing C.S. 2017, *English as a Lingua Franca in international business contexts: Pedagogical implications for the teaching of English for specific business purposes*, in Rainer F. and Mautner G. (eds.), *Business communication: Linguistic approaches*, Mouton De Gruyter, Berlin, pp. 319-356.
- Vettorel P. Forthcoming. *Communication Strategies in BELF: implications for business English Language Teaching*, in “Status Quaestionis”.
- Vettorel P. 2019, *BELF, Communication strategies and ELT business materials*, in “Iperstoria” 13, pp. 72-84.
- Vettorel P. 2017, *Communication Strategies, ELF and ELT materials*, in “A Cor das Letras”, Special Issue, pp. 74-98.
- Vettorel P. 2018, *ELF and Communication Strategies: Are they taken into account in ELT materials?*, in “RELC Journal” Special Issue -Teaching English as an International Language (TEIL): Realistic or Idealistic? 49 [1], pp. 58-73.
- VOICE. 2013, *The Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English* (version 2.0 XML). <https://www.univie.ac.at/voice/> (16.10.2020).