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English as a Lingua Franca and its Impact on Willingness to Communicate in a Second Language

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Abstract

Accelerating globalization has created an interest in studying the use of different languages in intercultural communication. This paper is based upon a small-scale study of expatriates' use of English as a lingua franca in Denmark and Germany. It discusses expatriates' use of English as a lingua franca and its influence on their willingness to communicate in the target language. The participants come from both European and non-European countries, and they all know English. They live temporarily in a foreign country whose target language is new to them. Besides illustrating the dynamic nature of English as a lingua franca, the findings show how its role in the participants' willingness to communicate in the target language is influenced by their attitude, communicative competence, point of view, position in society and social situation. The study comprises quantitative and qualitative data. It is limited to a short time span. Future research could focus upon possible changes over longer time spans.

Keywords: *Intercultural Communication, English as a Lingua Franca, Second Language Learning, Willingness to Communicate*

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¹Introduction

The study is an outcome of two separate research studies on expatriates' (expat) willingness to communicate (MacIntyre et al., 1998) in a foreign language (L2 WTC) other than English (see Tarp, 2020; 2021). The major focus was on WTC in Danish and German. As an additional element the studies offered an insight into expatriates' use of English as a lingua franca (ELF) in intercultural encounters. The focus of this study is exclusively upon ELF and L2 WTC.

The concept of expatriates has widened with the increase in free movement of workforce and studies in Europe. Expatriates are here defined as individuals who temporarily reside in a country other than their native country, and who do not view the host country as their permanent home. Statistics show a growing number of expats in Western Europe, e.g. in Finland (Dervin & Machart, 2015) and an increase in the number of mobile students worldwide (Beaven & Borghetti, 2016; Dumont & Lemaître, 2005; OECD, 2015). However, several OECD member countries have little information at their disposal on their expatriates (Dumont & Lemaitre, 2005).

In the light of the growing number of expats, this study sets out to identify, compare and discuss expatriates' use of ELF and their willingness to communicate in the target language. It is an attempt to contribute to the knowledge of expatriates' use of English as the language of communication and its impact on learning the target languages, in this case Danish and German, respectively. The study intends to widen its empirical basis to address all groups of expatriates, no matter which social status or position in society.

During the 21st-century, the learning of English has significantly shaped research on second language motivation due to its status as a global language. However, the impact of global English on the motivation and willingness to learn other second or foreign languages is an issue less discussed (Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2017).

Literature Review

To situate the study within a detailed framework, this section expands on the concepts of ELF, the role of ELF and willingness to communicate in a foreign language.

English as a Lingua Franca

ELF has been defined in different ways (Mortensen, 2013). It is essentially conceived 'as 'a contact language' between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication' (Firth, 1996, p. 240). ELF is part of a more general phenomenon of 'English as an international language' or 'world Englishes' (see e.g. Chen et al., 2019; Jenkins, 2003, 2007, 2014; Jenkins et al., 2017; McArthur, 1998; Melchers & Shaw, 2003; Seidlhofer, 2009). A different definition includes native speakers of English initially excluded from ELF communication and specifies 'any use of English among speakers of different first languages (including English) for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option' (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 7). Seidlhofer draws attention to the conceptual gap between applied linguistic research on the English language focusing on a narrow range of varieties of 'native speaker' English, and

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the ‘reality’ of English as it is used by the majority of its ‘non-native speakers’ (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 2).

Although ELF is the communicative medium, it does not mean that it is an advantage for everybody. Native speakers of English may be at a disadvantage because they tend not to be very effective communicators in intercultural encounters (Jenkins, 2003; Wright, 2009). ELF does not emanate from the native speaker centre in a way that it is designed to benefit its native speakers. They may not have understood that there are new rules of engagement including a different version of English (Wright, 2009, p.105). Seidlhofer argues that ELF is being shaped at least as much by its non-native speakers as by its native speakers (Seidlhofer, 2005, p. 339). Seidlhofer et al. (2006) discuss how users of ELF exploit the communicative possibilities of ELF. Research shows (Widdowson, 2003) that the international intelligibility of English does not depend on the pronunciation of specific phonetic sounds or correct grammar. Communicative strategies and general language awareness are more important. Native speaker language use of nuances might be communicatively redundant or even counter-productive in lingua franca settings. According to Canagarajah (2007, p. 926) and Firth (2009) ELF as a ‘form’ is variable and constantly brought into being in each context of communication. In this connection it should be added that within foreign language learning and teaching there has been some change from focusing exclusively on native-speakerism to the intercultural speaker and the intercultural mediator (see e.g. Barrett & Golubeva, 2022; Byram, 2008, 2009; Houghton 2009). From a teacher’s point of view there might be conflicting attitudes to what kind of English to teach, English related to its cultural base or English associated with a global culture (Jenkins, 2007; Mollin, 2006).

The Role of English

Apparently, there is a discrepancy between European policy makers focusing on multilingualism and the actual practice of European citizens using ELF as a means of communication. According to Halliday, ‘language is as it is because of what it has to do’ (Halliday, 2003, p. 309). There is a discourse about language and communication on the one hand and reality on the ground on the other. Discrepancy especially appears when applying a bottom-up instead of a top-down practice. ELF has entered the European Continent in two ways, by fulfilling functions in various professional domains and by being encountered and used by speakers from all levels of society. Although European policy makers especially focus on national languages (European Education Area, 2024), English is an important language taught in the European school system. The strong presence of English in school curricula is continued in the tertiary sector where there is a significant trend towards teaching courses exclusively in English (Seidlhofer, 2010). English is used within higher education with the aim of facilitating international communication (Jenkins, 2014). Seidlhofer concludes that ‘Having English in Europe has thus become a bit like having a driving licence: nothing special, something that most people have, and without which you do not get very far’ (Seidlhofer, 2010, p. 359). These arguments emphasize the role of ELF and its possible impact on the learning of other foreign languages (see e.g. Firth, 1996; Jenkins, 2003, 2007, 2014; Jenkins et al., 2017; Mortensen, 2013).

Although ELF might be widely used within European countries, there are discrepancies among others between Denmark and Germany. Firth (2022) talks about ‘Denmark’s

widespread bilingualism' and argues that Denmark has moved from being multilingual to bilingual including positive and negative impacts (see also Lønsmann et al., 2022). The situation in Germany is somewhat different. According to Ehrenreich (2010; 2017) English is considered as a business lingua franca and as an international contact language. Research shows that other languages are not disappearing from the scene; in particular, German maintains an important role among individuals and within the organization. Mollin (2019) argues that Germany is not as strongly English-oriented as some of its fellow European states, e.g. the Netherlands.

Willingness to Communicate

Research on the use of English as a lingua franca and its impact on the learning of other foreign languages also comprises the learner's attitude, point of view and willingness to communicate. Within foreign language education there is an emphasis on the significance of developing learners' willingness to communicate with speakers of different languages. L2 WTC can be conceptualized as 'a readiness to initiate discourse with specific person(s) at a particular time, using an L2' (MacIntyre, 2007; MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547). The focus is on the learner's decision to voluntarily speak the language when the opportunity arises (MacIntyre et al., 2003). This study especially seeks to explore beyond classroom WTC. In this case WTC can be conceptualised 'as a contextually dependent social phenomenon' (Cameron, 2020, p. 20), where communication behaviour is understood 'as an interaction between an individual and surrounding contextual characteristics' (Cameron, 2020, p. 13). A simplified version of MacIntyre's pyramid model (Henry & MacIntyre, 2024) is introduced to advance the field of ELF and foreign language communication and to highlight the dynamic nature and relevance of WTC within the framework of this study. The pyramid model has six layers, upper and bottom layers linked to each other and to the context. The relation between WTC and ELF focuses on aspects such as attitude, communicative competence, desire to communicate, point of view, position in society and social situation. A number of studies show different criteria for successful L2 WTC focusing on personality traits and situational constructs (MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010). In this study personality traits relate to language skills and communication behaviour and situational constructs relate to the other and space.

MacIntyre and McGillivray (2023) shed light on processes that affect communication when people have left their own cultural/linguistic context. They emphasize the dynamic nature of willingness to communicate. An important aspect of their research is anxiety (see e.g. MacIntyre & Devaele, 2014; Wang & MacIntyre, 2021), which will exclusively be mentioned in this study when appearing from the data in a slightly different version as lack of confidence. In this connection, it should be added that a recent study investigates language choice and willingness to communicate in a Swedish context (Henry & MacIntyre, 2024).

Peng has carried out research investigating factors influencing L2 WTC in EFL classrooms in China. She states that 'Chinese EFL students' classroom L2 WTC is socio-culturally constructed as a function of the interaction of individual and environmental factors both inside and outside the classroom (Peng, 2012, p. 211). Studies of L2 WTC carried out by MacIntyre et al. (2011) also reveal that L2 WTC is context-dependent and will change based on how learners interact with their environment. Interacting in different contexts will require different kinds of behaviour and language skills (Denies et al., 2015). These factors may influence not

only L2 WTC but also the use of ELF. What they have in common is that they focus both upon the learners' personality traits and environmental factors. Henry and MacIntyre (2004, p. 15) state that 'a person who may be *able* to communicate may not be *willing* to do so' emphasizing the influence and complexity of WTC. For further and more comprehensive research on WTC see (e.g. Kirkpatrick et al., 2024).

The Study

O'Regan (2014) argues that ELF research especially focuses on certain groups such as people being involved in international business and education, research and tourism/leisure. Research of ELF tends to ignore the poor, the disenfranchised, the ethnically marginalized and the exploited. Risager (2016) notes that ELF research could widen its empirical basis to address all groups. This is to some extent what is the outcome of this study comprising various levels of expatriates' use of ELF in different Danish/German contexts, respectively. Apparently, there is a lacuna between research of English used as ELF and the impact of ELF on learning other foreign languages. The primary focus of this study is to illuminate the influence of ELF on WTC in the target language. Linguistic aspects will only be mentioned when appearing from the data as being essential.

The case studies (see e.g. Creswell et al., 2007, p. 245; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2003, p. 13) were based on the view of intercultural dialogue as defined by the Council of Europe (2008) emphasizing the importance of the individual being able to communicate in intercultural contexts. In this view it is thought that the individual is the best one to measure his or her own competence to communicate in a specific situation, with specific addressee(s) and in a specific language. Self-report is useful when the aim is to know about the subjects' perceptions, the causes and the outcomes of these perceptions. Self-report proposes a new lens by giving voice to the participants and listening to their way of describing their impressions and attitudes. The data was analysed with the purpose of answering the research question:

RQ1: How does expatriates' use of English as a lingua franca influence their willingness to communicate in the target language?

The data for the study derived from two separate case studies, a quantitative study of expatriates in Germany and a qualitative study of expatriates in Denmark.

Participants

The participants include representatives of different nationalities. What they have in common is the fact that they study and/or work in Denmark or in Germany either by self-initiation or by invitation, and that they all attend Danish or German language courses, respectively. Choosing expatriates as a group representing both people working and/or studying in a foreign country gives a broader image of the use of ELF than exclusively focusing on mobile students. All the participants had English as their first foreign or native language, and most of them had a second foreign language. They came from various European and non-European countries. In some cases, there was no clear-cut difference between studying abroad and working abroad. Some expats studied, and some were also employed in part-time jobs. Other expats worked full-time. What they had in common was Danish or German as a foreign language and English as a lingua franca.

The participants in Germany can be described as a random selection from an expatriate population. 62 out of 96 participants between 20 and 64 years old completed a questionnaire survey of the view of expatriates comprising 11 closed and 4 open questions, administered online through the SurveyMonkey link on 'Expats in Germany'. The research study in Denmark can be regarded as a supplement to the German study. The participants in Denmark were selected at random from a Danish school teaching Danish for foreigners. There were 3 female and 7 male expatriates within an age span from 24 to 32. They completed a questionnaire, and based on the questionnaire semi-structured follow-up interviews were conducted. All the participants indicated age, gender, origin, language skills, education, profession and reasons for moving. Questionnaires and interviews were conducted in English, and the participants were anonymous with fictional names.

Methods and Analysis

The quantitative and qualitative answers illustrating the use of ELF were analysed for this study. An inductive process (Charmaz, 2006) coding for emergent themes led to the identification of two dominant discourses, namely encounters with the other(s) in different situations and different languages as a means of communication. Expatriates' reasons for moving were embedded in a complex web of personal and environmental factors comprising the following topics. Expatriates positioning: background, economy, education, family, personal network and social status. Expatriates' expectations: a career boost, a dream place, a must and a new life. Willingness to communicate was related to language skills and included activities in private, on the job and in the classroom. It was a question of authentic situations apart from the aspects of classroom communication mentioned by the expats.

The criteria that participants cited more frequently than others as the key to successful sojourn abroad were: Danish/German language skills, openness and positive attitude to living in a foreign country. The opportunities experienced by expatriates focused on increased intercultural awareness, learning a foreign language, getting new work experience and travelling. The challenges focused on language skills, intercultural adaptation and socialization. The advice given clearly focused on motivation and willingness to learn and communicate in Danish/German as a condition for coping as an expatriate. Other criteria were rarely mentioned such as the possibility to cope by using ELF although English appeared from the analysis as an essential determinant.

The analysis does not comprise a complete comparison to the WTC pyramid model (Henry & MacIntyre, 2024). Reference to WTC will be mentioned when appearing from the analysis especially focusing on personality traits and situational constructs (Zarrinabadi & Tanbakoei, 2016).

Although the samples for the studies were small and of a different nature, it gave some indication of expatriates' use of ELF and its impact on L2 WTC.

The Impact of English on Willingness to Communicate in German

On average, 79% out of the 61 participants in Germany agreed and 16% disagreed in the statement: *I would like to improve my German, but I mostly speak English with other expats*, showing expatriates' willingness to improve their German language skills and the impact of ELF. The importance of using ELF in different contexts appears from table 1. Although a clear

majority of expatriates were aware of the importance of learning and communicating in German, English played an essential role as the language of communication. The score of benefitting from ELF in various situations was very high, e.g. the work/office situation and in other contexts.

Table 1

Participant Reaction to the Statement: How Much Have You Benefitted from Your Ability to Speak English?

Context of Communication	Low or not all	Medium or High	Total
At cultural events	14 (22%)	48 (78%)	62 (100%)
When communicating with Germans	16 (25%)	47 (75%)	62 (100%)
When communicating with other expats	2 (3%)	60 (97%)	62 (100%)
When applying for a job	13 (21%)	49 (79%)	62 (100%)
At work/in the office	8 (13%)	54 (87%)	62 (100%)

Expatriates' WTC in German was influenced by their German language skills, different German attitudes to foreign speakers of German, different German accents and the possibility of using ELF. Expatriates mentioned job related and privately related communication challenges when communicating in German. Being accepted as a German speaking person was also seen as a challenge:

Having German people reply to you in English when you try and speak German to them because it's easier (Expat No. 55, Origin: England, Gender: M, Age: 20).

Germans are almost incapable of understanding German if it isn't spoken with perfect pronunciation (Expat No. 61, Origin: England, Gender: M, Age: 40).

In various contexts ELF became an easy means of communication and acceptance compared with German. It is quite clear that it is not only a question of the expatriates' willingness to communicate in German. Their attitude, communicative competence and position in society will influence their L2 WTC but also the addressees' attitude to foreign speaking people.

Table 2 shows that there is a difference between native and non-native speakers of English in their willingness to improving their German language skills.

Table 2

Participant Reaction to the Statement: I Practice my German When I Socialize with the other Students because for me, that is how I Improve my German

Reaction	No	Yes	Total
Native speaker	7 (64%)	4 (36%)	11 (100%)
Not native speaker	7 (22%)	25 (78%)	32 (100%)
Total	14 (33%)	29 (67%)	43 (100%)

Native English speakers might not have the same attitude to communicating in German as non-native speakers of English since they succeed by using ELF in many situations and do not need to improve their German language skills. They might be used to using English when

communicating with foreigners. Besides the addressees' awareness of communicating with a native English speaker might influence their attitude and willingness to use ELF.

The findings can be extended to willingness to communicate linked to personality traits and situational constructs. The personality traits appeared in terms of readiness to communicate depending upon German and English language skills. The situational constructs were seen in connection with the meeting with the addressee/the other not having patience enough or having the right attitude to understand a different version of the German language. It is essential to be aware of the participants' WTC since WTC both influences the expatriates' access to ELF and the TL.

The Impact of English on Willingness to Communicate in Danish

In Denmark there were conflicting attitudes to the Danish language. On the one hand, the participants were aware of the importance of L2 WTC and the Danish language class. On the other hand, they lacked confidence and willingness to practice. In many situations English became a means of communication due to its availability for the interlocutors. Some expatriates considered English as a means of communication when working or studying in Denmark. In the case of low-paid jobs such as cleaning and dishwashing, expatriates emphasized that they did not learn Danish by going to work. They managed by communicating in basic English with a limited vocabulary not related to the English language style and detached from English culture:

I associate the English language as an international language that helps me to understand people from different countries. I have never spoken to native speakers of English. I do not associate the English language especially with the UK or the USA (Bulgarian, F).

In some contexts, English seemed so essential that even learning Danish did not contribute to the feeling of belongingness to the Danish culture, 'Learning Danish has not contributed to my belongingness in Denmark. Denmark is a country, where most of the people speak English and people are helping foreigners, even though they do not speak Danish' (Spanish, M). English has a special status since you can manage by speaking English both in everyday life and in some job situations, 'Everyone speaks English, so no need to speak Danish' (Chinese, F). These comments show the variety in attitude to communicating in Danish and the impact of English depending on the expatriate's position in the Danish society and knowledge of Danish. It also shows the impact of the TL on ELF when living in Denmark. If the hosting people have a high level of English, it urges expatriates to use ELF to a greater extent than their willingness to learn and communicate in the TL. This is especially the case if expatriates have English as their first foreign language or if they are native speakers of English.

Expatriates' knowledge of English influences their access to learning Danish both inside and outside the classroom. When attending a Danish language class, expats are divided according to English language skills since knowing English means easier access to the Danish language. In the beginning, when attending a Danish language class, expats communicate in English during breaks. 'In the beginning we only speak English during breaks, not Danish' (Romanian, M).

Communicating in Danish in the Danish language class is pretty tough. I don't know if there is a solution for that, having in mind that there is no native Danes in the classroom, except the teacher. Most of the students are speaking English very well, so they will prefer to talk in English instead of Danish (Spanish, M).

The attitude to communicating in Danish changes over time all depending upon the expat's knowledge of Danish, the addressee and the context. It is obvious that the participants make language choices in shifting situations. In some situations, there is no need to learn and communicate in Danish for instance when taking a university course taught in English, working for an international English-speaking company or having a low-paid job. Thus ELF and the TL are intertwined and will change over time depending on inner and outer factors.

Comparison: Danish/German Willingness to Communicate

Although the research studies comprise two different approaches to expatriates' L2 WTC and the use of ELF in two different countries, the findings show some similarities between ELF in Denmark and Germany. For different reasons ELF is used in a variety of contexts. This is primarily due to its availability for the interlocutors. Some expatriates have easier access to ELF than to Danish/German, respectively. Expatriates' knowledge of the TL, their position in society and the context will have an impact on the use of ELF. In some situations, the need to communicate in Danish/German might not be strong enough in the competition with ELF. However, when English is chosen, an opportunity to develop language skills and better communicative competences in the TL may be reduced or even lost.

The difference between ELF used in Denmark and in Germany especially focuses on the addressee's reaction. Expatriates state that Germans answer in English in the case of expatriates having insufficient German language skills or accent problems. This attitude resonates with the difference between ELF in Denmark and in Germany; Denmark being almost a bilingual society and Germany being a society especially using ELF as a business language. Thus the context suitable for using ELF varies from Denmark to Germany. However, in both countries ELF will be sufficient and even important in some contexts. ELF varies between basic English with a limited vocabulary and English with specific terms and expressions suitable for and adapted to the expatriates' position in society. In this case the expatriates' willingness to communicate highly influences their choice of language. Although they might be aware of the importance of communicating in the TL, they might stay away from acting.

Discussion

The findings resonate with the definitions of ELF (Firth, 1996; Seidlhofer, 2009, 2010, 2011) stating that ELF is a contact language, a medium of communication and an international language among expats. As outlined previously, ELF is important in different contexts and among different groups of people. The fact that all the participants had English as the first foreign language or native language might influence and thus increase the use of ELF emphasizing the need to have a common language of communication (Halliday, 2003, p. 309). To some extent the use of ELF is consistent with the concept of L2 WTC (MacIntyre, 2007; MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547). Learners will voluntarily use ELF if the opportunity arises (MacIntyre et al., 2003). Consequently, ELF is especially used when learners' proficiency in

the TL is insufficient, or ELF seems more available for the interlocutors (MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010).

The L2 WTC situation and expatriates' use of ELF can be considered from a communicative angle. An intercultural encounter results in different outcomes in terms of discourses depending on the purpose. Discourse is a complex concept, largely because there are many conflicting and overlapping definitions (Fairclough, 1996, p. 3). Discourse is three-dimensional comprising a piece of text, an instance of discursive practice and an instance of social practice (Fairclough, 1996, p. 4). In this study discourse is used to refer to spoken language emphasizing interaction between speaker and addressee producing and interpreting speech as a social practice. Within that framework, expatriates are regarded as speakers and the Danes/Germans /other expatriates as addressees producing and interpreting speech. The purpose of the social practice varies whether it is inside or outside the classroom depending on individual and environmental factors (Peng, 2012). If the purpose is to learn the Danish/German language, opportunities exist in terms of Danes/Germans ready to teach Danish/German as instructors/teachers inside the classroom expecting the addressees/learners to speak the TL. If the purpose is to socialize or communicate with colleagues or private persons outside the classroom for instance during class breaks, at work or in private, there are learning opportunities in terms of other expatriates and/or Danes/Germans. However, some expatriates might fail to see real-life communication as a good learning opportunity. Furthermore, it is a less protected environment than the classroom where the focus is on learning Danish/German. Outside the classroom there are other focuses, and other language skills are needed. In some cases, an expatriate situation might come close to total immersion in a foreign culture requiring different kinds of behaviour and language skills (Denies et al., 2015). The immersion situation might put a certain pressure on the participants to use the TL. However, minor changes in the situation might mean the participants being most or least willing to communicate in the TL (MacIntyre et al., 2011).

The challenge is the Danish/German language if the expatriates' knowledge of the TL is insufficient to communicate neither with other expatriates nor with the Danes/Germans. In this case there is a relation between attitude, language proficiency and willingness to communicate. Consequently, in specific situations it might be easier and less complicated to communicate in ELF, which will hinder WTC in Danish/German. This is partly consistent with Widdowson's (2003) statement that international intelligibility of English does not depend on the pronunciation of specific phonetic sounds or correct grammar. The focus is upon communication strategies and availability. Besides it partly resonates with Henry's and MacIntyre' findings (2024, p. 28) shedding light on processes that affect communication when people have left their own cultural background. They state that if adult immigrants find that there are few opportunities to interact with speakers of Swedish, the result might have far-reaching consequences for WTC in the TL (Henry & MacIntyre, 2024). At the same time knowing English provides communication possibilities in nearly all everyday situations (Henry & MacIntyre, 2024). A great number of expats will constantly be faced with the choice between English and the TL. It turns out that although communication or talk is the overriding reason for learning the TL, some actors might fail to act.

The study does not focus upon linguistic aspects but upon reality and on how reality shapes ELF in some cases without any contact with native speaker English. Seidlhofer argues that

English is being shaped at least as much by its non-native speakers as by its native speakers (Seidlhofer, 2005, p. 339). Jenkins (2003) and Wright (2009) argue that native English speakers might be at a disadvantage because they tend not to be very effective communicators in intercultural encounters. The findings provide some evidence that for various reasons native English speakers might not be especially interested in improving their German language skills. They prefer to use ELF in some contexts, especially due to the addressees' reaction. Native speaker status might be a hindrance to communicating in German. Non-native English speakers' statement that they have never spoken English to a native English speaker emphasizes that ELF is influenced by speakers of ELF including the impact of different contexts and cultures. Thus ELF may be detached from the original English language and culture. The statements resonate with Byram's statement (2008; 2009) that lingua franca language is somewhat detached from culture and contexts of interaction and with Canagarajah's (2007) and Firth's (2009) statements that ELF is variable, constantly changed and influenced by the speakers.

The findings are indirectly comparable with MacIntyre's and Devaele's (2014) observations in the foreign language classroom focusing on student enjoyment and anxiety. These topics do not appear from the data since the study does not comprise classroom observations. However, several independent variables influence students' L2 WTC such as perception of their relative level of proficiency, confidence in own language skills, number of languages known, educational level and cultural background. Although there are communication benefits associated with knowing English, the knowledge might have both an enabling and a constraining impact. For some participants it might be a transitional stage related to the passing of time. English might become less important, and the knowledge of the TL might fluctuate week by week. Elements deciding the use of ELF seem flexible, related to language proficiency and the influence of environmental factors on the learner. This is consistent with MacIntyre's et al.'s (2011) argument that L2 WTC is context dependent and will change based on how learners interact with their environment (MacIntyre & McGillivray, 2023). Consequently, expats will experience different levels of willingness in a variety of social contexts. Thus both personality traits and situational constructs, all indirectly intertwined, will play a role and decide the choice of language.

Conclusion

This case study supports the idea that for some expats English has become the lingua franca although there is resistance and controversy due to the symbolic significance of national languages especially in the European Union promoting multilingualism. ELF is established as a language of wider communication enabling people from various levels of society to link up about common interests. However, there is a difference between the use of ELF in Denmark and in Germany. Denmark is a bilingual country to a greater extent than Germany where ELF is mostly considered as a business language. The reasons for using ELF vary from insufficient knowledge of the TL, lack of confidence in language skills and lack of willingness to practice the TL. The reason might also be lack of realization and awareness of the importance of speaking the TL. Furthermore, using English might be more convenient, easier and more available. The use of ELF is a product of the expatriate's language skills and position in society; personality traits and situational constructs being intertwined. In some cases, there is no urge

to communicate in Danish/German, e.g. if the expatriates work for an English-speaking company, have a low-paid job or are enrolled in an international university study in Denmark/Germany. The lack of L2 WTC is increased by the fact that English is the language known by a great number of Danes/Germans. Accordingly, English language skills may hinder expat L2 WTC although the knowledge of English facilitates the access to learning Danish and German, respectively.

The major differences between this study and previous studies in the field of ELF mainly focusing on mobile students are the dynamic nature of intercultural encounters and how they change over time in different contexts. It is also the divergence in expatriates' language skills and position in society. The findings shed light on the phenomenon of L2 WTC and ELF. It illustrates how difficult it is to generalize about the topic. Expatriate life is a complex, fluid, and multi-dimensional phenomenon influenced by internal as well as external factors.

The use of ELF is shaped and constructed by multiple contexts and influenced by the dispositions of the speakers themselves and the addressees. ELF seems to be important in a cross-cultural context for people from different cultural backgrounds. The better knowledge of the TL, the less use of ELF in most situations. The study shows that ELF plays a unique and distinctive role in today's world as a common language of communication varying from culture to culture and influencing L2 WTC. Although it is a small-scale study including limitations, it has yielded some insight into the use of ELF and its impact on L2 WTC over a short time span, but less is known about changes in ELF and L2 WTC over longer time spans emphasizing the need for future research in the specific field.

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