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# The habitat factor in ELF(A) – English as a Lingua Franca (in Academic settings) – and English for Plurilingual Academic Purposes

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**Abstract:** This article considers a case of local language socialization and accommodation in a multilingual community of practice: the use of English as an additional academic language for specific purposes at a bilingual Swiss university and its implications for teaching. The acronym ELF(A) is used throughout as short for English as a Lingua Franca (in Academic settings). The bilingual university's multilingual habitat also shapes the kind of ELF(A) used and this has in turn informed the teaching of English for Plurilingual Academic Purposes (EPAP). The discussion draws on both ethnographic research carried out in multilingual disciplinary speech events and on the author's simultaneous and continuing experience of developing and teaching English for academic purposes (EAP). It focuses on an oral presentation to a life science journal club made by a multilingual doctoral student socialized into the use of English almost exclusively in the ELF(A) habitat. Using the plurilingual repertoire to sustain "code-sharing" lingua franca mode, one of the habitat's most striking effects is the effort users are willing to expend in striving for autonomous functionality in their Englishes without overt switching, while simultaneously relying on their audience's multilingual flexibility and shared disciplinary knowledge, e.g. in the pronunciation of technical terminology. The habitat of a multilingual community of practice that assumes responsibility for its novices' language socialization in an additional medium is thus a supportive factor empowering junior scientists to function in English. To the extent that the habitat factor contains a limiting dimension of context dependence, however, teaching EPAP should also target speakers' (potential) needs for spoken academic language use elsewhere.

**Keywords:** English as a Lingua Franca (in Academic settings), English for Plurilingual Academic Purposes (EPAP), multilingual settings, disciplinary speech events, "code-sharing", lingua franca mode, ethnography

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# 1 Preliminaries

Language use is always situated (cf. Bell 2013: 131), it occurs in negotiable context(ualization)s (cf. Auer 2009: 95–97). The term *habitat* as alluding to the specificities of English as a lingua franca (ELF) practices first struck me when I heard a recording of the April 2001 Guardian Weekly/Macmillan Global English Debate[1] at the IATEFL Conference in Brighton, in which one of the panellists, Barbara Seidlhofer, employed the following metaphor in her call for a new, additional conceptualization of English:

> Once we realize that ENL, English as a native language, and ELF are actually quite different animals with different habitats, different behavioural patterns and different nutritional needs, as it were, we can accept them as different and treat them appropriately, each in their own right.

The application of the term *habitat* in this article moves on from the metaphorically ecological to the ethnographic[2] to examining the extent to which and manner in which the ELF "habitat factor" as elaborated by Pölzl and Seidlhofer (2006) may or should be extended to encompass specific academic contexts, thus complementing from a pedagogically motivated position the takes that others, e.g. Smit (2010: 55) and Kalocsai (2014: 29), have offered on the "habitat factor" as viewed through the prisms of their research contexts. What is essential to appreciate in the quotation above is the expression "as it were" (meaning "so to speak"). Languages are not animals or otherwise animate agents, but language users are. Through their agency (Ahearn 2001, 2010) speakers may together and individually adapt their communicative repertoires when they are motivated to do so (Gal 1979) and actualize and co-create their habitat.[3]

1 http://www.theguardian.com/GWeekly/Global_English/0,8458,400340,00.html (audio recording, accessed 16 May 2015).

2 In ethnography, a habitat is variously understood (depending on naturalist or constructionist orientations) as the research site, i.e. "the field"; a natural environment that people live and work in including certain social relations; a network of ties; a lifeworld embedded in a local context and social milieu and, importantly, ethnographers' co-constructions and co-creations of this field site/community and its practices through their communications with social actors and their 'thick' descriptions (see, e.g., Barker 2012; Gal 2012).

3 Despite this preliminary clarification, our understanding of ELF is indeed still emerging from "primordial mud" (one reviewer's ecological metaphor for habitat), as befits the short time we have had to study different facets of the phenomenon. Just as early Hymesian formulations of the situatedness of language were "under construction" and "typical of the early stages of an academic discipline" (Bell 2013: 135) before his SPEAKING taxonomy (Hymes 1972), so are various efforts to grapple conceptually with ELF. Mortensen (2013), for example, argues in favour of analysing the

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From the perspective developed below, in a complex fluctuating multilingual environment, *habitat* indicates a local dynamic co-constituted by sociolinguistic, spatial, material, symbolic and social factors exerting influence from the outside, more or less overtly motivating speakers, behaviours and attitudes over time and sometimes triggering seemingly sudden events. New practices may emerge, perhaps initially in certain niches when conditions are changing (Schaller-Schwaner 2005). As in Pölzl and Seidlhofer (2006: 174, fn. 2), but apparently in contrast to Björkman (2013: 36), the term *habitat* is not seen here as directly related to Bourdieusian sociology and "habitus".[4] While a notion of socially entrenched "mind-and-body" sets intersects with habitat, for example in "knee-jerk" language choices, and whereas such a somatically internal(ized) "auto-pilot"[5] can be very difficult to access and modify (but cf. Wade 2011), it is not an overarching, deterministic force. My use of *multilingual habitus* below is narrow, more specific and didactic. Harnessing what Gogolin (1994, 1998) criticizes as "monolingual habitus", i.e. a "common sense" conviction-perception that monolingualism constitutes normality,[6] a multilingual habitus conversely and deliberately assumes that functional pluri- and multilingualism is to be expected and that language users can agentively change structurations by collectively acting on new needs, trying out alternatives and creating new experiences, thus over time rendering this normality. This view does not claim to solve the tension between structure and agency (cf. Jaspers and Verschueren 2011; Block 2012, 2013; Ahearn 2001, 2010; Bandura 2006; Blommaert 2010; Gardner and Martin-Jones 2012) but may serve as a tool to understanding the use of ELF in multilingual academic communities of practice.

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context of ELF interactions along the lines of Hymes's *in situ* dimensions. In his view, Hymes's (1972) letter S for *situation* (*setting* and psychological *scene)* would explain Pölzl and Seidlhofer's (2006) "habitat" sufficiently (Mortensen 2013: 40). However, there is simultaneously too much in constant flux over time and new interactional constellations due to the temporariness (or even absence) of sedimentation processes typical of language use in stable communities, and there are other linguistic resources in the repertoire that can form part of the context. As in Blommaert (2010: 1), "[w]hat is needed is a new vocabulary to describe events, phenomena and processes, new metaphors for representing them, new arguments to explain them". Therefore it seems that despite the relevance of foundational texts, theory culling should not precede theorization.

**4** For a discussion of the limitations of Bourdieu's (1991, 2000) habitus concept for ELF language regulatory interactions, see Hynninen (2013: 25ff); for a thorough appraisal of Bourdieu and other social thinkers with a view to agency and structure in intercultural communication, see Block (2013).

**5** I would like to thank Vinzenz Theodor Schaller for providing me with this image (see also Fuss 2006: 49–50; Webb et al. 2002: 115).

**6** For a recent appraisal of Gogolin's notion, see Pluskota (2013).

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## 2 Introduction

In a linguistic habitat more complex than its trademark ("Switzerland's Bilingual University") suggests, speakers at the University of Fribourg have long used English as a lingua franca in certain academic settings, while its language policy has only reluctantly (and partially) acknowledged the role of EAP in the past decade (Schaller-Schwaner 2005, 2008, 2010b). Challenging though this has been for locally teaching EAP, it has made exploratory research into ELF(A) all the more rewarding (Schaller-Schwaner 2005, 2008, 2012). In a bottom-up fashion, ELF(A) has come to sustain the communication needs of multilingual disciplinary communities of practice, to serve as a primary teaching language in many Master's programmes, to (circum)navigate the local linguistic boundary, or, in certain contexts, to bring about additional-language socialization for academic and professional purposes. One particular case and its institutional embedding are selected here to illustrate the above, proceeding in the following way. By way of conceptual introduction, I first discuss the respects in which English as a lingua franca can be regarded as a multilingual practice and a "code-sharing" mode (Schaller-Schwaner 2010c, 2011). Next, the local setting or context, the habitat, of ELF(A) at this university will be focused on. Subsequently, the discussion will move on to summarize what the ELF habitat factor comprises, mainly drawing on Pölzl and Seidlhofer (2006). Having clarified the conceptual ground and drawn attention to the setting which partly shapes the way English is used at this university, the contribution will sketch the ethnographically oriented study of ELF at UFR, which was motivated by my concerns and curiosity as an EAP lecturer. Of the two settings in two different faculties explored in this ethnography, only one will be discussed here, namely an innovative type of lunch-time event in biochemistry, which I attended for more than one year. The example of the pronunciation of a technical term used by a presenter in one of the biochemistry lunchtime journal clubs will be used to illustrate the habitat's multilingual saturation and the flexibility of the "code-sharing" mode. My perceptions and belated realization of a misunderstanding that did not emerge during the presentation are used to discuss a question of intelligibility. My examination indicates that the habitat factor may have to be transcended in teaching that also aims to help learners target international convergence and interlingual accommodation with a view to using ELF(A) elsewhere. The ELFFRA[7] case is concluded by reassessing the habitat factor for teaching English for Plurilingual Academic Purposes (Schaller-Schwaner 2009).

7 FR of the place names Freiburg/Fribourg has been inserted into the acronym ELFA to indicate the habitat as an influential factor.

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## 3 ELFA and "code-sharing" mode

English as a Lingua Franca (in Academic contexts) as inspired by Widdowson (1994, 1997) and Firth (1996) and conceptually and empirically developed since the turn of the century by Seidlhofer (2001, 2004, 2011, cf. also Seidlhofer et al. 2006), Jenkins (2000, 2007), Mauranen (2003, 2006, 2012; cf. also Mauranen et al. 2010), House (2002, 2003), Meierkord (2001, 2002, 2006), James (2005, 2006) and others started out as a new paradigm in the study of the English language (in applied linguistics, ELT, pragmatics and sociolinguistics). As a consequence, the question of whether or not this language practice among additional-language users of English from various linguistic backgrounds constituted a new variety was continuously debated, though repeatedly rejected. Dealing with criticism constructively, James (2005: 142) sketched a concept of shifting "constellations of dialect-register-genre", and Seidlhofer (2005: 162) argued that "[v]arieties are social constructs that exist in and through the perception of speakers" (similarly in Seidlhofer 2011: 47; but see Mortensen 2013 for a critical appraisal of unsettled aspects). The more data are collected, however, and the more descriptive research has accumulated, the clearer the multilingual aspects of ELF have become (e.g. Klimpfinger 2005, 2007; Cogo 2012; Hülmbauer 2013). In the same vein, but more specifically considering within-English characteristics of ELF, the concept of "code-sharing" lingua franca mode (Schaller-Schwaner 2010c, 2011) serves to put into perspective and relativize the notion that code switches/language alternations on the linguistic surface are a requirement for regarding a linguistic practice as multilingual. Compatible arguments have been made by Hülmbauer (2011, 2013).

In an ELF(A) situation in which plurilingual speakers from different L1 backgrounds come together in a specific academic context and converge on one shared medium of communication that is often no one's L1, there may be no or little overt code-switching and only one language on the surface most of the time, but users will still be drawing on their dynamic, complementary, asymmetric plurilingual repertoires. Their other languages (or other parts of the repertoire) will be activated in the background or remain on stand-by, as it were, not least due to participants' awareness that their interlocutors or audience are also plurilingual. This argument is based on Grosjean's (2001) conceptualization of language modes, which allow speakers to accommodate on a behavioural continuum to interlocutors and situations in which resources from some parts of their language repertoire are functional but not from others or to explore and exploit a wider range of resources no matter how many languages are visible on the surface.

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This lingua franca use of English can be highly variable in surface linguistic features within English, in the users' differential skills, and also in their purposes. In some educational contexts in which ELFA is used, these purposes can comprise disciplinary language socialization in an additional language, thus "multilingualization". This process and the intention of making individuals become (more) functionally multilingual assumes what will, from certain perspectives, appear to be reverse causality. Instead of presupposing that the use of an additional language is motivated by the presence of (native) speakers of more than one language, i.e. of people who already have different languages, bi- and multilingualization is about using an additional language in order (for oneself or others) to gain or keep it, i.e. develop or expand or maintain e.g. oral fluency in this language for the sake of achieving autonomous functionality in it.[8] Using ELF or becoming an expert user of ELF takes time and getting used to and is often quite an effort initially. It can be tricky to maintain the language choice and express everything in English. But regular oral academic practices in ELF expand or strengthen this "code-sharing" mode. So the more one "does" ELF, the better one becomes at converging and accommodating and the less one involuntarily switches to another language, which is activated to some extent but needs to stay inhibited for imminent output. This is relevant not only psycholinguistically but also in that the shared practice over time constitutes the ELF community of practice and "contextualizes" English, i.e. (socially) grounds it in local users, explaining some ELFFRA participants' emic perception of operating in an English-using environment.

What must also be borne in mind about ELF and "code-sharing" mode in the habitat examined here is related to the local bottom-up choice of English. It originated not in policy or language management, which at the time was vehemently opposed to English, but in local collective practices and distributed decision-making motivated by different needs and opportunities. These choices of ELF as motivated by different factors are framed here primarily in terms of the design concept advanced by Bell (1984, 2001). Originally developed to account for linguistic choices in public broadcasting, it also refines our view of why speakers giving oral presentations in academic settings choose one or another language ("designing" their message) both with regard to the recipient(s) and to the roles that topic

8 This could also be seen as akin to a form of language planning, but in the case of ELF(A) it is rooted in specific-purpose functional and disciplinary identification considerations. It is considered here to be a form of bottom-up language socialization in an educational context (cf. e.g. Duff 2010, Atkinson 2003). The word formation itself was inspired by Widdowson's (2003) notion of bilingualization and the title of the 2008 Jyväskylä University conference on Mediating Multilingualism, which included in its scope the idea of "language use as a mediational means through which multilingualism is constructed and experienced" (personal e-mail communication from one of the conference organizers, Tarja Nikula, 3 December 2007).

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and setting play. In Bell's model, audience is heterogeneous and carefully differentiated, comprising not only second-person addressee(s) but also third-person audience types, the most important of which is auditors: known, "ratified" (i.e. approved or licensed; see Bell 2013: 141), participants who are however not addressed. "Audience design is therefore a strategy by which speakers draw on the range of linguistic resources available in the speech community to respond to different kinds of audiences" (Bell 2001: 145). In the bilingual institution sketched in the next section, the local languages are in principle conceptualized as territorial (i.e. language use is legally determined by geo-political space) and as indexing their L1 speech communities and thus in a sense as assigning listeners to this or that side of the language boundary. The default expectation in public speech is that a message in one particular local language is intended for the group that speaks it as an L1. The choice of a local language thus divides a mixed audience into addressees and auditors, ratified (see above) but not addressed listeners (who therefore often stay away) while the choice of English does not. As a consequence, an audience-designed message in ELF means that the choice of English is motivated responsively as the only shared language or as a new shared language among its local additional language users. The explanatory power of Bell's 2001 model simultaneously extends beyond the here-and-now in also accounting for initiative choices speakers make to change or reconstitute a situation. There may be yet another third-person category of audience that is salient for the speaker, viz. a reference group one affiliates with. In this referee design, one's linguistic choice to use English is not (only) responsive but "initiative" and expresses one's identification with the reference group (Bell 2001: 165), for example one's international disciplinary community. Besides, the choice serves disciplinary socialization in the local community of practice. Often, the choice is mediated by the genre in the Swalesian sense (Swales 1990, 2004), meaning this type of speech event, this particular activity, is conducted in English in order to perform the discipline locally.

## 4 The University of Fribourg as an ELF habitat

Turning to the University of Fribourg as an institutional context and habitat for using English, it should be noted that the period when I began to study the where, how and why of English as an additional academic language (outside ELT and English Studies) in this institutionally bilingual context was a time of change (whose inception nationally was documented by Murray and Dingwall 1997) when this development was regarded as dissent from the university's public language policies. In two disciplinary contexts (first biochemistry and later psychology) it became publicly visible, however, not only in writing, for example on

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departmental websites, but as an oral practice in lunchtime speech events officially conducted in English. Since these were accessible to everyone, I collected data in both settings but also continued to observe the larger institutional context.

Even today, a decade later, public occasions may prompt displays of opposition to English. In the opening ceremony of the 2014 CercleS conference, for example, the then *Recteur* commented that English had "conquered" this university. As pointed out above, however, languages are not agents. The stance favoured here is Penelope Eckert's (2003) sociolinguistic one that languages should not be anthropomorphized and that it is speakers who decide to use a language. Language users are the agentive forces, they have intentions and mobilize capacities, not languages themselves.

The University of Fribourg has been a bilingual institution since its foundation in 1889. Language is often understood territorially in Switzerland, and language use is managed accordingly, which is why the university's name is not a hyphenated double name but two names *Université de Fribourg* and *Universität Freiburg* (henceforth UFR). Not incidentally perhaps, the university's official name in English does not include the German toponym. German is a minority language in the canton and in the town of Fribourg. As a cantonal university, UFR provides education in both cantonal languages, French *or* German, but since around the turn of the century bilingualism has also become a brand and unique selling proposition. In terms of realizations, one may, following Brohy (2005), distinguish between parallel, complementary and integrative institutional bilingualism. The integrative form is the only one that really forces students to use both languages at least receptively. It is typical of the Science faculty, which never had the financial resources for the twin monolingualism of the parallel type, in which chairs and study programmes exist in parallel in both languages. Besides, local scientists have always argued that the science content is more important than the language, which is why they have also been taking Scientific English for granted for decades. For the last decade, the university has also had several Master's programmes with English as a primary or additional medium of instruction, particularly in the Sciences, and for these the discrete new term bi(tri)lingualism was coined when the use of English became official in 2005.

## 5 The habitat factor and speakers' initiative choices

Having considered ELF, code-sharing and the design factors that motivate the choice of ELF, and having taken a quick glance at the institutionally bilingual

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setting of UFR, the connection between the two will now be considered. Starting with Pölzl and Seidlhofer (2006), who examined an ELF conversation in a Jordanian context in which four multilingual ELF speakers explained their shared L1 culture and language attitudes to a fifth, the only non-Arabic, co-participant, many ELF researchers have pointed out that the local context is decisive for fine-tuning ELF, in other words that there is local accommodation in locals' realizations of English. And this appears to apply also to cases in which the habitat is not the "native" home turf of speakers but a temporary environment they have chosen for a purpose, for example their tertiary education (Smit 2010). This goal, which is why they are there, is or becomes part of the *there*: the site, the rhythms of work, the people, their mission (Swales 1998).

In the case considered in the next section, the biochemistry habitat comprised premises, labs and their "inhabitants", seminar and lecture rooms, smells of organic processes, corridors with equipment and at one end a small kitchen and conference/dinner table, posters and open shelves on which past issues of journals were gathering dust, the crucially important refrigerators with their emergency instructions in English saying who to call in the event of power failure (the professors' private telephone numbers!), notice boards with glimpses of informal shared sociality, the group photos of the research teams on the website (as well as on the last slide of every life science research talk I have attended), and the awareness that immediately beyond all this was a territory in which English was of less or no use.

The physical location has an impact on how speakers use ELF. Speech events on one's home ground, in one's own habitat, enable speakers to use English "in and on their own terms". While there is thus a strong emphasis on contextual conditioning inherent in Pölzl and Seidlhofer's (2006) conceptualization, their focus on whose decisions are involved already indicates how their "habitat factor" overlaps with or is interrelated with agentive motivational factors that co-constitute regular ELF speech events. As argued elsewhere (Schaller-Schwaner 2011, 2012, 2015), the local speech events at UFR are a product of design factors that include the community of practice, the genre, the function of disciplinary language (self)socialization (see also Duff 2010, Atkinson 2003) and speakers' individual and collective agency and awareness. The initiative aspect of language choice (cf. Bell's 2001 referee design above) means that speakers do not only adjust their speech in response to members of the audience and the environment but they themselves also alter the existing situation through their linguistic choice: their use of ELF simultaneously changes and transposes the context(ualization). The habitat is not merely a given that exerts influence on language use but it is permeated by and negotiated through the language choice.

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Thus, if in a bottom-up fashion the language users, or the decision takers, the agents of change, decide on their own initiative that they want to use ELF, not only because there are so many L1s and L2s and L3s but because their disciplinary communication internationally is in English and their students will not succeed if they do not have this linguistic resource, then this changes how speakers contextualize themselves as users of English. It becomes *their* mode of operating linguistically, *their* English. To sum up this point, the habitat factor is co-constructed by the physical location and the other factors which shape the decision for and the use of ELF for disciplinary academic purposes in certain settings and genres of the local community of practice in, for example, biochemistry.

Of the many factors influencing ELF phenomena, the habitat factor's foundational nature is probably due to its heuristic importance. It is connected to a path of exploration, discovery and knowledge construction which commences with where to look, not what to find. It may assist us in locating dynamic and complex language use not only in individuals but also "in the interstices between people and context" (Larsen-Freeman 2009: 587).

## 6 The ELFFRA case study in biochemistry

When English as a lingua franca is used in academic settings, the acronym ELF is extended to ELFA (cf. Mauranen's ELFA Corpus). To emphasize the *in situ* aspect, the embeddedness of this English at the institutionally bilingual university, I have used the extra letters FR for Fribourg/Freiburg to create the acronym ELFFRA, standing for English as a lingua franca in Fribour/Freiburg academic settings. Auto-ethnographically speaking, this is connected to what provided the initial impetus for my research, namely the experience that something was going on with English on my doorstep that also affected my students' needs and me as an EAP teacher. While my first course for specific academic purposes for (geography) students, offered in 1998, was discontinued after one semester for lack of demand, the experience in 1999 was very different. For the first session, the room was crowded with almost 70 psychology students, and the last one who managed to squeeze in put a chair against the door and sat down to stop others from entering. The colleague who had been teaching the EAP course for researchers since 1996 drew my attention to what he had heard from a participant, namely that biochemistry had a weekly event entirely in English. A lot of English was going on behind closed doors, however, and the official line of institutional language management did not enhance the presence of English at all (cf. Schaller-Schwaner 2005, 2008, 2009). However, when disciplinary lunchtime events officially conducted in English "spread" from

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biochemistry to psychology, I set out initially to document and explore them and then to understand the where, who, how and why of different contexts and the intervening factors that motivated local people to use English on home ground for their specific purposes. Intelligibility or pronunciation, though the crucial aspect of one of the founding ELF publications (Jenkins 2000), was not a research interest at all. My work was inspired by Swalesian ethnographic analyses (notably Swales 1998, 2004) and an interest in emic perspectives and experiences of English. Within EAP, my quasi-ethnography is definitely a contextual analysis more than a textual one (Hyland 2014: 397). The current interest emerged slowly, after numerous cycles of interpretation and understanding, and mainly subsequently in cross-pollination with learner needs and teaching concerns (cf. Schaller-Schwaner 2015).

In an ethnographically oriented exploration modelled on Smit (2003), observation took place at the time of transition to bi(tri)lingualism. Weekly Beer & Lunch Seminars in Biochemistry, which had been conducted in English for 12 to 15 years, were attended for more than one year and the oral presentations plus follow-up Q&A sessions were recorded and interviews conducted. Mainly, there were journal club presentations (of recently published articles), an important life science tradition. They were given by doctoral students, who summarized and critically examined the merits or demerits of publications in respected peer-reviewed journals. There were also few guest presenters talking about their own research. About 20 per cent of the doctoral students at the time were from India. They had been an important catalyst for the use of English originally. There were no L1 users of English present apart from one Indian student who regarded English as her first language before Hindi. The Beer & Lunch Seminars were regular weekly events for the whole biochemistry unit, i.e. all research teams (usually one professor, one post-doc and several doctoral-student assistants). They took place even outside teaching weeks and on biochemistry premises, on the top floor of the building that housed the unit. On entering the seminar room and while the respective presenter was getting ready, participants were chatting in interpersonally preferred languages until, after a brief silence and without chairing, the presenter cleared her throat and the talk started in English.[9]

From this biochemistry setting and the doctoral student journal club presentations, one example of technical terminology is selected here because it seems to illustrate the habitat factor quite clearly and because the speaker who used the term is also an interesting case of the language socialization factor as she developed her English almost exclusively in this particular habitat. English was her fifth language after Spanish, Italian, French and German. Growing up in

**9** For more detail see Schaller-Schwaner (2009, 2012).

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the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland she had been immersed in Italian from childhood and she used it locally with other Italian speakers in her research team, while teaching biochemistry courses in French. Her learning of English as a foreign language at school in Ticino had been limited to just one year, and before starting her doctoral education she spent one month in England on a language course. At UFR, she had taken an EAP oral presentations skills course with one of my colleagues. This presenter was also talking about an article published in a prestigious journal. It was concerned with the role which a certain biochemical process (see below) plays in the activation of a gene which is connected with a serious disease. My original ethnographic intention was to immerse myself in the context and understand the setting and the disciplinary practice of using English for this and other speech events, to see who was involved and how it unfolded. The focus here, however, will be on the pronunciation of a technical term. Additional language users of English among the readers of this contribution may at this point make a mental note of how they would pronounce the term *DNA hypomethylation*. The term is not frequent outside specialist discourse, does not have an individual entry in either the *Longman Pronunciation Dictionary* (Wells 2008) or the *Cambridge Pronouncing Dictionary* (Jones et al. 2006), and its base, *methylation*, is pronounced differently by chemists and biochemists. The availability of audio recordings of the word as a YouTube resource (e.g. "Emma saying" http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhg37IzzfP4) may be seen as an indication that the word is difficult to pronounce.

In the course of the oral presentation, there were a few fluctuations in the presenter's realizations, transcribed below in Table 1. Probably none of the realizations corresponds to what an anglophone biochemist would say. However, accent as such, i.e. consistent, predictable variation in pronunciation (such as a t realization of *th*) is to be expected, and it is not necessarily an intelligibility issue in a habitat in which people are used to a particular L1-induced realization of a technical term and know what the term refers to anyway.

**Table 1:** Perceived realizations of technical term *hypomethylation* in ELFFRA presentation.

| Transcription of word heard | Context of use in the presentation |
|---|---|
| hɪpɒmetɪˈleɪʃn | in the title of presentation |
| ˌɪpɒmetɪˈleɪʃn | in the introductory part of the talk |
| ˈɪpɒmetɪˈleɪʃn | in a definition of the term |
| ˈɪpermetɪˈleɪʃn | not clear, later analysed as in contrast to *demethylation* |
| ɪpermet.tɪˈleɪʃn | in a definition of the term |
| ɪpermetɪˈleɪʃn | in an explanation of its function in a cancer cell |

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Impressionistically, while attending the presentation session, all fluctuations seemed recognizable as *hypomethylation* to this ELF listener, using her available interlingual resources (German, English, some French, receptive familiarity with Italian, extensive experience of how francophones and italophones pronounce English, remnants of school Latin). What was noticeable in the presenter's oral production for me as an EAP lecturer was that she had an *h*-full (target-like) pronunciation when she pronounced the term for the first time in the title, but then her attention was otherwise engaged and the effort of speaking freely reduced the energy left to concentrate on articulating the glottal fricative h. There was an Italian influence on the pronunciation of the *y*-, so that the prefix was pronounced with an ɪ, which is however also one vowel value of the letter *y* in strong syllables, instead of with the diphthong aɪ, which the presenter used on the word *highlight*, for example. In any case, nobody drew attention to this variation, and after the Q&A she was praised by the most senior professor who said "You've killed the paper!" Everybody in attendance joined in his laughter and the biochemistry gathering dispersed.

In addition to the presenter, three other speakers participated in the Q&A, either professors or post-docs. Apart from English, they had variants of German as L1, regularly used French, and had either learnt Latin (plus in one case Greek) and or a Romance foreign language at school or outside: Italian and Portuguese or Spanish.[10] Interlingually, their plurilingual repertoires were thus highly compatible with the presenter's and they had known her for more than three years. The praise and compliments the presenter received were connected with the fact that questioning published research is valued and a co-constructed consensus about its flaws had been reached. The laughter may also have been one of pride or relief that she had navigated her way through this speech event despite many difficulties. As the presenter was a member of an orphaned research team whose principal investigator had "reduced" his professorial activity for a special assignment and eventually a career elsewhere, the biochemistry division as a community of practice and its most expert members had shared responsibility for the individual concerned.

It registered as noteworthy much later, when re-reading the transcription of the speech event, that *hypomethylation* had not been used in the Q&A discussion even though there had been some confusion. In discussing the research design and the confusing effect it may have had on the results, the synonyms *de-methylation* and *lack of methylation* were considered as causes of methylasis or methyl transferasis instead of *hypomethylation*. Checking the audio again as well as the transcription and the contexts in which the term was being used, I started wondering why the

**10** The third had learnt Russian as a foreign language but had also studied Latin at school.

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same technical term had been defined twice (cf. above). Then the insight struck me that what had been taken to be realizations of the same term were actually two different technical terms with contrasting prefixes, *hypomethylation* and *hypermethylation*, which the presenter had tried to contrast by means of her linguistic resources asˈɪpɒmetɪˈleɪʃn and ˈɪpermetɪˈleɪʃn with a second(ary) stress on the first syllable of the prefix.

# 7 Pronunciation ambiguity and semantic transparency

The Greek prefixes *hypo-* and *hyper-* have been productive for scientific neologisms in English since the 19th century. The earliest loans (from French) of derivations containing *hyper-* go back to the 16th century, and this prefix has also taken on new uses and meanings in computer science (beyond that of 'too much' or 'more than is desirable'), while *hypo-* has not expanded (Dixon 2014: 126f). A pronunciation contrast[11] between *hypo-* and *hyper-* is tricky for everyone (e.g. when teaching about hyponyms and hypernyms) because either can be pronounced with a schwa in the second syllable. The prefixes thus become ambiguous in RP, which is why Wells (2008: 394; s.v. *hypo-*) recommends not reducing the syllable and always pronouncing an əʊ diphthong in the unstressed syllable. Unless this is observed, both *hypo-* and *hypermethylation* (ˌhaɪpəʊmeθɪˈleɪʃn and ˌhaɪpəʳmeθɪˈleɪʃn) could become ˌhaɪpəmeθɪˈleɪʃn in non-rhotic realizations. In fact, the presenter's ELF realizations ˈɪpɒmetɪˈleɪʃn vs. ˈɪpermetɪˈleɪʃn or ɪpermetɪˈleɪʃn are easier to distinguish than a reduced schwa in both, but only provided one pays attention to the unstressed half of the prefix and the ɒ vs. er contrast. However, one would generally expect a stress shift to pointedly contrast the second syllables of the prefix; and given that *hypo-* and *hyper-* derivatives whose suffixes are stress-shifting have haɪˈpɒ and haɪˈpɜː (e.g. in *hyponymy* and *hypergamy* or *hypertrophy*), one would also expect a long central vowel for *–er* to contrast it further with *–o*, resulting in haɪˈpɒ (or possibly haɪˈpəʊ) vs. haɪˈpɜːʳ. Further, given that as an outsider to the discipline I was not aware as a listener that the deviation of more or less methylation was crucial but contextually blurred by the fact that both are involved in the development of cancer, I did not pay attention to the unstressed half of the syllable. The ELFFRA presenter's realization had tried to signal this contrast by means which could be a

11 Not all English loan words containing *hypo-* and *hyper-* are analysable within English, e.g. *hyperbole, hypocrite, hypothesis* (Dixon 2014: 127).

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spelling pronunciation inspired by Italian, which a lot of people were familiar with in the habitat, but which may have caused the avoidance of the term and its replacement in the discussion. What needs to be noted is that neither the most obvious means of realizing a contrast by stressing the syllables in question nor the most useful long central vowel had been used.

Why the speaker had not realized the contrast in this way was still unresolved, however. Checking the presenter's vowel qualities again, I eventually saw the connection with a few verbs that she had used repeatedly and had pronounced in an unusual way, namely *occur* and *observe* and *were*, which she had pronounced ɒˈkʊ(ə)r, ɒbˈserf and were not əˈkɜː, əbˈzɜːv, wɜː (or its rhotic equivalents and a weak form variant in *were*). Judging from the evidence of the oral presentation and the presenter's contributions to the discussion, this ELFFRA speaker did not have the central NURSE-vowel ɜː in her repertoire. So precisely the vowel that could have been used to contrast the prefixes clearly as haɪpɒ and haɪpɜː was missing.

As a disciplinary outsider, i.e. not a member of this habitat, my realization that there were actually two contrasting prefixes came late, and as a non-specialist the general context did not help much because both hypo- and hyper-methylation are implicated in the genesis of disease in different ways. Therefore, it seems that outside the habitat, perhaps even in a different biochemistry habitat, the NURSE-vowel ɜː gap in her repertoire may have caused a recognizability problem. This qualitative interpretation is corroborated by Jenkins's (2000) findings with respect to misunderstandings among international users of English from which she derived her famous Lingua Franca Core. The only vowel in her core of pronunciation features which she suggests are crucial for international intelligibility is the long central NURSE-vowel ɜː.

# 8 Implications for multilingual disciplinary socialization

The ELFFRA speaker's oral presentation performance reflects the success of her multilingual disciplinary socialization in many respects. She was able to perform and instantiate the genre, give an ad-hoc-style "fresh talk" (Goffman 1981, quoted by Swales 2004: 190, for an oral presentation "in prepared conversational style"). She also signpost, preview the content of her talk, position herself

**11** Not all English loan words containing *hypo-* and *hyper-* are analysable within English, e.g. *hyperbole, hypocrite, hypothesis* (Dixon 2014: 127).

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as someone who can critically examine published research, and deal with questions after the presentation, fulfilling the criteria of her community of practice. The presenter completed her doctoral education six months later, spent another six months as a post-doc (and looking for a job) and subsequently worked in “company-management-sales” in two different international pharmaceutical companies in Switzerland. According to personal information she shared with me, this work did not involve making much productive use of English: “unfortunately now I just use French and German as foreign languages”. She indicated that the departure of her supervisor had been unfavourable to her finding a research position. In addition to such contingencies and from an EAP perspective, one might also surmise a linguistic factor. Even though multilingual disciplinary socialization with ELF works, focused language support would be crucial in making speakers expert ELF users outside their habitat.

In this particular example, the approximate or alternative way of contrasting the prefixes was locally functional in so far as it did not cause overt misunderstandings among the members of the community. Due to familiarity with the presenter’s ELF and the interlingual resources (Hülmbauer 2013) of the other participants, her specific agentive way of contrasting the prefixes had been sufficient for the habitat. Another contributing factor is that technical lexis tolerates more fluctuation because it is more recognizable to subject specialists. The ELFFRA speaker’s contrastive pronunciation was in all likelihood actually easier to recognize in the habitat than an RP reduced syllable with schwa, which makes the two prefixes ambiguous. But outside the habitat, the presenter would arguably profit from having the central vowel ɜː in her repertoire. It may be a vowel that is not easily picked up through language socialization as it is not a frequent monophthong in English (cf. Jenkins 2000).

## 9 Implications for teaching English for Plurilingual Academic Purposes

The habitat factor means that there is more to learn in English for plurilingual purposes than in EAP for monolingual anglophone contexts because of wider divergence and more difficult convergence. Interlocutors need oral experience with variability to learn accommodation skills and intelligibility tolerance. At the same time, presenters in formal academic settings need autonomously recognizable sound shapes for oral convergence beyond the habitat. In the case in question my teaching target for pronunciation accuracy would, for example, be the NURSE-vowel ɜː. In academic words from Coxhead’s (2000) Academic Word

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List, for example, it is needed in words such as *occur*, *observe, research, interpret* (AWL 1), *emerge* (AWL 4), *diverse* and *insert* (AWL 6). A diphthong realization as aɪ for –*y* in the prefixes *hypo*- and *hyper*- would also be recommended. Strategically, on the other hand, what one learns from this ELF habitat, which is also an important strategy outside this particular habitat, is the use of synonyms. And perhaps in this respect once again ELF users are spearheading a linguistic change that is going on in other varieties of English as well. Anecdotally, I noticed that in more recent publications, biochemists seem to be using the terms *under*- and *over-methylation* more than *hypo*- and *hypermethylation*. The tendency for greater transparency of form-function mapping in ELF is also functional outside specific ELF habitats.

English for Plurilingual Academic Purposes (Schaller-Schwaner 2009, 2012) also means making a point of a functional conceptualization of language, developing ELF confidence in students through content orientation and simulation of locally appropriate oral academic ways of doing things in English. EPAP also means support for local ELF users, speeding up the language socialization they are trying to bring about and developing, strengthening or consolidating code-sharing ELF mode. EPAP also means tailor-made EAP support in one's own habitat not despite institutional bilingualism but because of it. Students who are aware of language contact phenomena and have learned to deal with them become more comfortable with them. Learners who know about the dynamism of the multilingual repertoire and who are sensitized to the habitat factor and to its limitations become more confident. Often, but not always, they are also made curious about the other languages which have an impact on local Englishes.

## 10 Concluding remarks

The habitat factor is a very interesting phenomenon in ELF and worth bearing in mind in teaching English for Plurilingual Academic Purposes. It is helpful in that speakers can draw on familiarity and shared ground when using English together on their own terms, and it promotes tolerance for variation where people have similar or compatible interlingual resources. Their common background knowledge as a disciplinary community of practice, while itself under construction and in the process of becoming through participation in the journal club speech events, provides shared schemata and terminology for comprehension beyond intelligibility as a property of the code. The unambiguously accessible discrimination of two prefixes is thus supported (and made redundant) within this habitat's reach. However, the habitat factor is also a factor of context-dependence, which might hinder communicative effectiveness outside the

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habitat. Using ELF outside one's habitat, or with a specific reference group outside the habitat in mind, as mentioned in the context of Bell's (2001) referee design, could mean having to override the habitat factor and trying to converge, for example on internationally recognizable pronunciation. This is one of the means by which language specialists at university language centres can and should support the academics in the disciplines who may be expert ELF users themselves but are not language teaching or LSP specialists. Recognizing the value of ELF use as a functional multilingual practice in its own local right and consolidating code-sharing ELF mode despite psycholinguistic competition from other linguistic resources in the repertoire also means that local language support in university language centres will demonstrate holistic appreciation of a multilingual habitus and self-concept and the possibility of a multilingual conceptualization of target languages beyond English. The case reported here entails a challenge: for the ELFFRA presenter and her community of practice, for me as a disciplinary outsider, and to some extent in terms of what Blommaert calls "the challenge" (2010: 1–4, 20–21). On the one hand, we are still conceptually tied to handling languages as artefactualized, countable units (e.g. in my description of the ELFFRA presenter's language repertoire) and objects of study; on the other we experience or witness the dynamic flow of personal trajectories in political frames over time and scales. The case shows what it was feasible for someone to achieve through the local disciplinary additional-language socialization process and what obstacles can be overcome. At the same time, it demonstrates the need for other and additional support and points to the extent to which this speaker could have profited from more extensive EAP instruction, which was not available at the time. It also demonstrates the limits of the habitat, what Auer (2009: 94) refers to as the contextual *Gültigkeitsbereich*. As I have pointed out elsewhere (Schaller-Schwaner 2015), intelligibility is not only a moving target (Levis 2007) but fluctuating and dependent on the degree to which redundancy reduction and variable realizations can be tolerated inside and outside the habitat, as an emic as well as an etic category. ELF means sharing the multilingual work of intelligibility (Pitzl 2015), and students struggling to build, maintain or refine one language in their plurilingual repertoire for autonomous oral use while trying to handle psycholinguistic competition from other parts of it appreciate explicit feedback and opportunities to tackle pronunciation insecurities. The emergence of a pronunciation focus here mirrors the emergent trajectory of English for local use from silent reading to a language which users also want to employ orally with one another, particularly to co-create specific academic speech genres (Schaller-Schwaner 2010a, 2012, based on Weissberg 1993, Aguilar 2003, Swales 2004). It also has to do with Blommaert's (2010: 5) observation that a sociolinguistics of globalization and

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mobility is a sociolinguistics of "speech" ("actual language resources deployed in real [...] contexts"), and with my own path from the emic ELF work of accommodating to what I heard as fluctuations of the same word to the etic analysis of my mismatch and what this means for EPAP.

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# Bionote

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