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*ELF and GenZ: can a language and a
generation shape each other?*

Abstract

The goal of this paper is to analyse how the English language influences the L1 use of its speakers: if and how perception of language uses and cultural identities have been affected. Investigating the experiences members of Gen Z, the final intent of this work is also to find if and how identities have been interested by the global expansion of the English language. To conduct this research, I will ask people that by birth are considered “GenZ” to respond to some questions about their use of English, their idea of culture and identity, and how these two elements might be interconnected. The question I want to try to answer is whether and how this generation and their use of the English language are taking a role in the perception of cultural identity.

A voi che mi avete supportato

A voi che mi avete sopportato

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Introduction

The aim of my dissertation is to explore and analyse the relationship between English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and its Generation Z users. I chose this topic because I too am part of Gen Z and an avid English user: I believe that exploring how this connection came to be might be useful to understand spontaneous cultural acts: in the digital world English has become the main spoken language, and Gen Z members, being called the “digital native” people, have to have at least a little knowledge of English to live in it. Such expansion of the English language could bring significant changes not only to languages, but also the cultures and identity of English speakers. Through an online questionnaire that involves Gen Z members I will attempt to study their opinion on the English language, how they use it and see it as a part of their daily life. I have chosen this type of approach as it a direct resource of study, shedding a light with a testimony directly from English speakers.

The first chapter will study the global use of English. Firstly, it will analyse the impact of the English language expansion and what it means for people all around the globalized world. Then it will turn to the concept ELF, focusing on how it happened and the different definition surrounding this concept. It will then study the current uses of ELF starting from the previous research on the issue, further investigating the possible outcomes of the growth the English language has been going through.

The second chapter will explore language, culture and identity and the relationship among these three important aspects of our life. Initially this chapter will try to analyse the difficult concept of culture and what does it mean, focusing then on the roles of languages in life, focusing on the impact a language can have on the cultural identity of a person or nation. It will then finally discuss the relationship between language, culture and identity. To conclude, the chapter will explore the idea of Intercultural Communication and the relationship it has with ELF.

The third and final chapter will report the results of the questionnaire and present an in-depth analysis of the most important and significant results and the personal answers and comments from the participants with a final reflection on the study. Through the questionnaire I will first ask the respondents about their previous and eventually current study of English. I will ask participants to give detail on their normal use of English

outside an academic context and how the English language has influenced their native language. I will ask them to give describe some struggle they might find while communicating in a foreign language in an intercultural context. To conclude I will ask them to give an opinion on the relationship among language, culture and identity and to give their general idea of the English language.

Chapter 1: A global use of English

After an overview of the different definitions of the concept of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), this chapter will go through the different attitudes toward ELF, and then it will analyse the different uses of ELF.

1.1 ELF: definitions

1.1.1 English as used all over the world

Over the years, the number of English speakers has increased significantly. According to the American organisation Ethnologue: *Languages of the World* English is, as of 2022, a first language for more than three hundred million people: this is a considerable number, due to its being an official language, administrative, or cultural language in eighty-eight countries, Adding those who speak it as a second language, the number of speakers goes over one billion speakers¹: the reference resource *The World Factbook* produced by the Central Intelligence Agency estimates that English is spoken by 18.8% of people, including both L1 and L2 speakers². Many studies could be conducted on the reasons behind these numbers focusing on various issues: for instance, by analysing the expansion of English speakers through historical and geographical approaches, studying the linguistic reasons behind why English is still such a popular language, focusing on the impact that it has on other languages. Considering the fact that more than one billion people speak English all across the world, different researchers have offered different perspectives on this linguistic field of research.

Over the centuries, there has been the need for a “lingua franca”, a language that could be used by those who do not share the same first language for different purposes such as the common communication between distinct populations, trade, culture sharing, diplomacy, and agreements, and many more. Different languages were considered “lingua franca” in ancient times, most famously the Latin language thanks to the expansion of the Roman Empire. In modern times it is safe to assume that English is the

¹ <http://www.ethnologue.com>.

² <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/world/#people-and-society>

common lingua franca: following the hegemony of English-speaking countries such as the United Kingdom or the USA, English became the official language of many different countries and organisations, for instance the United Nations (UN) or the European Union (EU). English is the lingua franca of scientific research, technology, and many different fields. It is in this context that different scholars across the world have tried to give a definition of what really English as a lingua franca means. The concept has been studied in numerous studies, providing different definitions and opinions. At the same time, the constant growth of globalization awareness, mobility, and their effect on language “began to alter the picture in applied linguistics from a mainly sociolinguistic viewpoint in the first decade of the millennium, with the implications gradually seeping into the rest of the field.” (Mauranen 2018: 107).

1.1.2 What is ELF and who speaks ELF?

As previously stated, English is today’s lingua franca: this statement would be difficult to deny. Seidlhofer indeed points out that the global expansion of English, its penetration of societies, is a phenomenon in which no other world language has been able to take part (Seidlhofer 2011). She defines ELF as “any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often only option” (Seidlhofer 2011: 7 italics in original). Linguist and academic Jennifer Jenkins refers to ELF as a “specific communication context: English being used as a lingua franca, the common language of choice, among speakers who come from different linguacultural background” (Jenkins 2009: 200): both her and Seidlhofer’s definitions have one thing in common: English has become the “communication medium of choice” (Seidlhofer 2011). Again, many different studies could be conducted to study why and how this has happened, but it is safe to assume that English is a safe option of communication. Jenkins goes on underlining one ELF characteristic: she observes that ELF separates *differences* and *deficiency*: ELF differs from ENL, but it does not treat the differences as deficiencies of the speakers (Jenkins 2009: 202).

In academic situations, ELF speakers could make errors and mistakes that could be treated as deficiencies: for students who has a Latin cultural background it could be difficult to embrace a Germanic language like English; scholars who are studying English in a country that has thigh relationships with the UK or the USA or scholars who live in a

country where a high concentration of ethnicities is happening might find themselves “mixing” their English with the other language(s) they see and hear every day. Although it could be seen as important that in the academic context students are taught languages following their rules and that the correct language is used in the different context (in official and formal contexts), ELF recognize that all the differences between the different variants are not due to speakers’ deficiencies: ELF speakers can and eventually do make errors and mistakes, as in the majority of cases they are learners. “In fact, ELF speakers are considered language users in their own right, rather than deficient users of English according to “native-speaker norms”. And all language users can be ELF speakers, including native speakers” (Cogo 2016:79).

It would not be wrong to state that this massive growth of the number of English speakers is due to the need of people who do not share the same language knowledge to be able to interact, and this does not exclude those who speak it as their national language. ENS too have the need and or want to connect with people who do not speak English as a first language, just like diplomats, scholars, and tradesmen in ancient times, using English as a bridge language. Seidlhofer’s studies introduce her idea of ELF: “in most cases, it is ‘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” (Seidlhofer 2005: 339). This approach includes first language speakers: ELF is an option, a possibility for all people, whether they have a similar linguistic and or cultural background or not. Mauranen (2018) suggests that already inside the definition there can be found the answer as to who can use ELF: “no basis can be seen for excluding those who have acquired English as their first language: not only do they participate in speaking English as a Lingua Franca, but they also contribute to its variability” (Mauranen 2018: 107). There are different situations in which the English language becomes the only available communication option. These situations, along with the fact that for the majority of English speakers English is a foreign language, create a continual shaping of the English language at the hand of all its speakers, although “there is still a tendency for native speakers to be regarded as custodians over what is acceptable usage.” (Seidlhofer 2005: 339)

1.1.3 Opinions on ELF

Jennifer Jenkins, besides giving her definition of ELF, argues over two different and opposite reactions to the concept. With the first opinion, scholars believe ELF to be monolithic phenomenon: Rubdy and Saraceni (2006: 11 in Jenkins 2009: 202) believe ELF to be a “monolithic and monocentric model” that tends to necessarily water down the position of intercultural communication and cultural identity, even making them affected by ELF. Jenkins disagrees with this opinion, as she believes that actually the Expanding Circle are the casualties of “standard” British and American English models. As she states, this position leans into conflating ELF with EFL, so that those who apply to it tend to see ELF variants as *deficiencies* rather than *different* variants of ELF (Jenkins 2009: 202-203). She criticizes the “derogatory nature” of the language used to talk about ELF; believing that the loyalty to the English speaker ideology is what this vision is based on; although she claims that a direct correlation between the ELF opinions and ELF speakers identity cannot be made. (Jenkins 2009: 203). It could be argued that this vision tries to put the sole British and American English models at the centre of what ELF stands for, denying the pluricentricity and all the passages that the English language and societies have been through to have English as the modern lingua franca.

The second vision of ELF that Jenkins studies stands for an opposite view: “according to this position, ELF and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) are one and the same. No distinction is made between English learnt for intercultural (ELF) [...] and English learnt specifically for communication with English native speakers (EFL)” (Jenkins 2009: 202-203). If people were to adhere to this opinion of ELF, they could argue that a lack of standardisation in ELF might lead to the creation of a new type of English, a contact language made up of the many different English variants, perhaps even suppressing the “original” British and American English models. Although this might happen, it would likely take decades if not even more: even if the English-speaking countries started taking actions to “protect” their language, because of British history, their hegemony through the centuries all around the globe, because of globalisation (that as an ever-growing phenomenon it still has a strong impact today) and the consequent need for a lingua franca, a lack of standardisation was almost bound to happen.

Cogo (2016) mentions: “ELF is therefore a dynamic medium of communication, which changes and adapts to different contexts and different repertoires of users, and situational, in that it emerges from the different constellations of speakers and contexts.” and also adds that ELF, indeed because of its dynamicity can’t be categorized with the common sense of “variety” (Cogo 2016: 79-80). Cogo (2016) view on ELF might be used to argue the second attitude analyzed by Jenkins (2009: 202-203): on one hand critics could warn against a lack of standardisation and a consequent creation of a new type of English but, taking in consideration Cogo’s view this warning could be demounted: “ELF therefore is not conceptualized as a foreign language, as speakers do not learn it for the aim of emulating a native speaker [...] but to use it as a lingua franca, in intercultural contact situations.” (Cogo 2016:79): if critics were to not consider ELF as a *variety* the risk of it “oppressing” British and American English models would be minimized. Cogo (2016: 80) recalls the flexibility and fluidity of ELF, and the researchers’ need “to go beyond a static description of formal linguistic features and focus instead on the processes that facilitate and motivate communication.” (Cogo 2016:80).

1.2 Uses of ELF

1.2.1 Where it is used and how

As previously mentioned, English is de iure and de facto the official language of different countries and different organisations, whether it is for geographical or historical reasons: for example, in the English-speaking world; or for the role that an English-speaking country took in the creation of said organisations. “The supremacy of English is also being established step by step in European politics and various European and international organizations in Europe” (Seidlhofer, Breiteneder, & Pitzl., 2006: 5), for example, the United Nation (UN) where English is one of the six official languages. In 1946, shortly after its creation, the General Assembly and the Security Council adopted English (plus Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish) as the official and working language³. In the EU instead, the UK did not take part in its foundation, becoming a member in 1973 and officially leaving the EU in 2020 after years of negotiations. Still, through the years the EU has added the new member’s language to the list of official languages of the Union:

³ <https://www.un.org/en/our-work/official-languages>

a learning language: having some English knowledge can help its users to amplify their ability to learn and engage in new subjects or cultures, communicating their knowledge to other people and vice-versa. English functioning as a lingua franca, enables people to connect with each other “based on common interests and concerns across languages and communities.” (Seidlhofer et al., 2006: 5). According to Seidlhofer (2006), “a domain directly linked to education is that of scientific research”: English is a must known language to access information, therefore, scientists “function more as members of an international community having one common language than as members of national communities, both in their writing and in their selection of background readings” (Truchot, 1997 in Seidlhofer et al., 2006: 4)

1.2.2 Studies on the Uses of ELF

The use and influence of English in various media has been actively studied and still is an important subject in the linguistic field. In researcher Pietikäinen opinion, “So far, only a few studies have delved into ELF as it is used in maintaining long-lasting social relationships and constructing social identities in what could be described as the private social sphere” (Pietikäinen 2017: 321). Drawing from her research, she shows that ELF is a necessity in relationships to understand each other, and although English is the most widely spread foreign language, its use might still be challenging: ELF speakers are more likely to give more importance to being understood rather than the way they try to be understood. (Pietikäinen, 2017: 323-325) This study could be further amplified by researching the same role that ELF has in long-lasting friendships relationships, even taking in consideration long-lasting friendships relationships that take place through a technology device: thanks to technology, and thanks to English being the most widely spread foreign language it is very easy to reach for new people online and develop a long-distance friendship that could even turn in a physical friendship. Taking into account the 2020 Covid-19 lockdown could have researchers find interesting results: during lockdown millions of people were forced to quarantine at their home, many of which took advantage of this time to put themselves back to learn English and make new friends through the internet, which may have had some impact on the way ELF is spoken.

Pietikäinen (2017) poses the bases for an interesting debate. As she states, early researchers treated ELF as something that goes beyond culture and the ability of identification of speakers, with studies assuming ELF to be culturally neutral. This conclusion might be taken for true if we were talking about objective contexts: for instance, a professor explaining the logic of mathematics in a multilingual class or a person stating objective facts: a classic example might be “water is good for you.” Still, even in these two contexts, culture is present in every single word the ELF speaker uses: a part of the speaker’s identity is brought out. As Pietikäinen states however, “whether ELF is a language of identification is not, however, an issue of debate; it is a matter of context. When used only as a foreign language in limited circumstances such as in ordering dinner at a restaurant, ELF hardly engages a large proportion of a tourist’s language identity” (Pietikäinen, 2017: 324). The initial observation of culturally neutral ELF and Pietikäinen’s statement suggests that both opinions could be considered true: some contexts exist in which ELF conversations take place with a bigger or a smaller portion of ELF speakers’ culture.

Martin (2019) recalls numerous studies conducted on how young people engage with English through electronic media; she reports on previous studies that underlined “the pervasive use of English in entertainment media” (Ch’ien 2011; Lee 2004; Leung 2009; Moody 2006 in Martin 2019: 605) alongside McCrum, Cran, and MacNeil (1992 in Martin 2019: 605) analysis that “underscore the extent to which English dominates the global recorded music industry” (McCrum, Cran, & MacNeil 1992: 26 in Martin 2019: 605). It could be argued, with further investigations, that these uses of ELF are the most common among the younger generations who have an extremely easy access to the Internet. Seidlhofer (2006) observes that it is indeed in these contexts that English has had the most visible impact, evidently “spreading beyond the elites” (Seidlhofer et al., 2006: 5). At the same time, the approach to learning English or the motivation to on-going English studies could be caused by the need or want to be able to engage in the above-mentioned contexts.

1.2.3 English and ELF in the EU

“The current role of English in Europe is thus characterized by the fact that the language has become a lingua franca, a language of wider communication, and has entered the continent in two directions”, functioning as a tool in official and professional situations and at the same time being used by all society levels in the everyday life (Seidlhofer et al., 2006: 5). The European Union promotes multilingualism in the respective member countries and while this goal is a remarkable one, one possible implication of this is that there is the need for a common language that all EU citizens (448,8 millions in 2022⁵) can access: even if today ELF has taken that role, Cogo and Jenkins (2010) argue that in the EU region we tend to think of English as a language associated with the United Kingdom and Ireland.

Although their study was conducted in 2010, before even the first Brexit poll was made (June 2016), I believe that it could be said that this sentiment toward English is still present today: English was “seen as the language of international business with emphasis on ‘English as a basic skill’, devoid of any cultural connotations. The role of English, and its relation to the other European languages, is not clearly defined, while the phenomenon of English as a (European) Lingua Franca is generally ignored” (Cogo & Jenkins 2010) so that could explain why in the EU there is not a need or a want to officially recognize ELF: English has always been a lingua franca across the Union: “and is considered an integral part of general education (Huber, 1998 in Seidlhofer et al., 2006: 4), a “basic skill taught in elementary school alongside computer skills” (Graddol, 2004: 1330 in Seidlhofer et al., 2006: 4).

Professor Suzanne Hilgendorf, in an article published in 2020, confirms that English is still a lingua franca or a default code, “gaining uses within established speech communities in Europe” (Hilgendorf 2019: 215-216). Cogo and Jenkins suggest that this sentiment does not happen outside the EU in other parts of the world “because they are in the process of appropriating the language for their own purposes, a process that

⁵ https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/languages_en

involves accepting the legitimacy of the phenomenon English as a Lingua Franca” (Cogo & Jenkins, 2010: 272). As Seidlhofer (2010) observes, the reasons behind this “conflictual” issue stands behind the relationship with the European countries and their relative recent past: “the proclaimed ideals of integration, harmonization and transcultural understanding are radically at odds with what most Europeans have been brought up with: an education in and socialization into what Florian Coulmas once called ‘the ideological dead weight of the nineteenth century’ (Coulmas 1991: 27 in Seidlhofer 2010: 356): characterized by a conflating of political loyalties with linguistic loyalties, and of language with culture.” (Seidlhofer 2010: 356). Indeed, the history of countries is one of the main factors in modern days mindset: the 19th century Europe saw the creations of many new nations going along the sentiment of nationhood. Their languages too are what influence and shape the mindset and choices of today’s Europeans.

Chapter 2: The communication among culture, language and identity

This chapter, after a focus on the connection between culture, language and identity, and their relationship with each other, will address the concept of Intercultural Communication and its relationship with ELF.

2.1 Culture, language and identity

It could be said that we live and breathe culture every day, no matter what. Whether I were to simply watch a gymnastic competition, bake a cake, read a book, I would be immersed in cultures (possibly from all around the world), and I would be able to identify as something more than just my nationality: rather than just saying “I’m Italian” or “I’m a gymnastics fan” I can say that I am both, without the one excluding the other. It could therefore be argued that the culture of a person is the sum of the many different cultures someone can experience: drawing from Kramersch (1998:10), culture can be seen as a “membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and common imaginings.”: A person could have more memberships to different cultures, bringing one or more to the surface whenever he/she wishes thanks to a specific language knowledge.

2.1.1 The role of language

Although I might need to use another language (or a specific part of a language) to experience some parts of my culture, my persona does not change: one part of it might be more visible to the outside. Byram (2006:5) states: “Languages symbolise identities and are used to signal identities by those who speak them”: if the language taught in schools is considered the “standard”, the fact that a person might be capable of using a variety of it or a completely different one to partake in any experience, recognizes that people might have more than one social identity and they use their language knowledge to express it in specific situations: A gymnastics fan might use a specific English lexicon to discuss the sport with other fans, a baker will use the related bakery vocabulary. These simple examples could be used to understand how deeply cultures, languages, and identity are related: as Kramersch (1998:3) writes: “Language is the principal means whereby we

conduct our social lives”, so it could be said that a person can choose the language to use to live their social lives.

As Fantini (2012:63) suggests, language could be considered the *absolute mediator*, so it could be affirmed that language is the main vehicle of the different cultural expressions. It is at the same time the vehicle and a product of cultures: with it populations are able to share every aspect of their knowledge and thoughts and beliefs with other populations and vice versa. Language also is the product of evolution, of the history of a population: it can show how and why a language is spoken in a certain way: even if the US and the UK share the same language (English), American English can show that the American people came into contact with the native-American population and that American English evolved differently than British English: “language arises from and shapes our experience, so much so that some say we are less than “human” without language” (Fantini 2012:264).

It could be said that language is one if not the most creative and powerful tool every human possess: studies theorize “language as a tool for achieving social and psychological ends, and hence as a resource for managing everyday activities” (Noels et al. 2012:54), and as Kramsch (1998:3) affirms we conduct all our social lives thanks to languages. It is a powerful tool as we use a language that stores within itself centuries of history, and the history of millions of our ancestors, “gaining access to the thoughts of generations of speakers over hundreds of years and in diverse places, people we have never even met.” (Fantini 2012:265). The ability to create magnificent visual arts is something that belongs to only a fraction of humans, but almost all humans are able to speak at least one language. With it we are capable of creating things comparable to the stunning visual arts, through poems, novels, even bringing to life what does not actually exist (for example with fairytales). “Every human language is capable of all these things (and more); however, each language does so “differently”: all languages encode the human experience but in varying ways” (Fantini 2012:265).

The languages we speak could have some impact on how we see and perceive the world around us: “consider that our entire view of the world is shaped in our minds, aided and influenced by the linguistic system to which we were exposed from birth.” (Fantini 2012: 264). One example could be honorific terms: in Asian countries the use of honorific term is something deep and profound as they are divided very specific categories: an inappropriate use could be seen as disrespectful, even if it happens between friends. On the other hand, in European countries, although there is a sense of respect toward authorities and people such as professors and doctors, this does not happen in the same way. In Italy, while speaking to a professor, the way a student conjugates the verb (using the 3rd person singular) already shows the respect in the student-professor relationship. A Spanish teacher might ask the student for a first-name basis form of addressing, but it does not mean the student will disrespect the teacher.

Boroditsky (2009, 2011) suggests that language can shape the way we think, for instance on the way a person who speak a left-to-right written language might organize things differently than a person who speaks a right-to-left language (For example Hebrew or Arab). Although they show very interesting results, transferring them to an international/ intercultural context they almost fade into the background: this does not mean they lose importance, they are still very interesting and important factors that with further research in different fields could actually gain relevance. Fantini (2012:264) gives an example of the way language and (in this example) culinary culture are related: all Italians have one specific term for the very specific type of pasta, depending on shape and preparation, and all Italian use the correct term according to the language. This does not mean that non-Italian people do not understand the difference among the types of pasta; they might simply not care that much. Even if an Italian might make a grimace when hearing the wrong term used to describe pasta, they might simply correct the mistake and move on.

2.1.2 Linking language and identity

Whoever can exercise their right to receive education, will learn the official language of the country they are studying in: usually this corresponds to the first language of many of

the students, but, as Byram notices, we need to take into consideration children of multilingual families, as it is possible that they speak another language at home (Byram 2006:8). The fact that children acquire an official language from when they are very young could strengthen the bond that there is believed to be between an identity and the language associated with it (Kramsch 1998:65). In the case of multilingual children, they are ideally encouraged to remain bilingual, keeping all identities, the one(s) spoken at home and the language(s) of schooling, in other words a national and/or regional language (for instance the Ladin minority in northern Italy) (Byram 2006:8-9). The idea of linking a language to a specific identity is not something uncommon (Kramsch 1998: 74-75). For instance, politically, one might link the ability to speak a nation's official language correctly to being "truly" part of that nation, and therefore it becomes a patriotic thing; the danger is that those who do not share the same language are considered as 'others'.

In some cases, there are endangered languages that need to be protected, as they are the vehicle of learning about past culture or the culture that belongs to minorities. A fear of identity loss may be connected to the study and use of foreign languages: English is one of the most widely studied languages in the world, and a fear of loss of national identity might exist. As Byram states: "there is little, if any, research evidence to justify this fear or dismiss it": yet it is hard to generalize, as there are numerous contexts, societies and psychological factors that have an important role in the consideration of a language (Byram 2006:10).

Lambert (1956, 1978 in Noels et al. 2012:53) argues that where two languages come into contact, where one is a clear majority over a "minority" language, there may be a process defined "subtractive bilingualism". People belonging to the minority may lose their language and cultural identity in favour of that of the majority. Instead, in the opposite process called "addictive bilingualism", the dominant group does not lose their language and culture while at the same time acquiring that/those belonging to the minority. As Lambert emphasises, such a process can benefit monolingual societies and it has been so over the course of centuries: indeed "sociopolitical disparities often lay at the heart of social psychological differences between ethnolinguistic groups" (Noels et al. 2012:53).

On the other hand, this theory could suppose that the culture and language that is absorbed is kept and conserved, but it should be remembered that often such processes do not happen through pacific ways, but rather with violent methods. For example, with colonization the dominant group imposes their language on the minority societies using violence and fear, using the ideology of cultural superiority to cause extinction of different culture and even ancient populations (cite source here). As Grosjean notices, “biculturals have to come to terms with their identity. They have to take into account how they are perceived by members of each of their cultures [...] Rarely do biculturals receive the message that they are both A and B. Faced with this double categorization, biculturals have to reach a decision as to their own cultural identity” (Grosjean 2019: 39-40). Defining social boundaries and cultural identities is something difficult (Kramsch 1998:66). Humans could be defined as a social animal: we are bound to come in contact with each other together with our knowledgs and languages: today cultures are a testimony of our ancestors coming in contact and mixing their cultures. One example of this could be Latin: people started “mixing” this highly cultural language with the common language spoken everyday leading to its disappearance. The same is happening to many languages spoken today.

2.2 Intercultural Communication

When first reading the words “intercultural communication”, it may seem easy to understand the meaning: communication between cultures. Different questions might be asked after saying this statement: What does culture mean? What makes culture? Are cultures really the “speakers” in a communication context? It could be argued that “culture” is not a conscious being that has the capacity to speak and therefore communicate. An answer to this debate could be that culture does communicate via the language used by its users. This affirmation could lead to a spontaneous question: is language part of culture, or is it a means to the end that is communication? To understand what communication among cultures means it is necessary to analyse what is meant with “intercultural”, but mainly what “culture” really means.

2.2.1 What does culture mean?

“The distinctive ideas, customs, social behaviour, products, or way of life of a particular nation, society, people, or period. Hence: a society or group characterized by such customs, etc.”⁶ is one of the different “The Oxford English Dictionary” definitions of culture: it is a product, a way of life, something that was made, crafted by those who came before us through centuries, evolutions, wars, contact between people who spoke similar or completely different languages. But when we are born, do we already have a culture? Clearly the new-born children cannot express the culture they are born in, although the fact that they are born with a nationality already implies the possession of some kind of culture that would come from the parents, and even if in their first days of live children might see some cultural aspects but are obviously not capable of stock them. Taking into consideration the etymology of the word “culture”, The Oxford English Dictionary⁷ shows that this word has a strong relationship with agriculture and the cultivation of land. At the same time, as the land needs to be cultivated to produce good products, so does culture: all people, to express any kind of culture, whether it is the one related to their country or not, need to somehow cultivate them. Young children will need the help of the parents, the family and the educational system, but thanks to the many tools available to most people around the globe, we are capable of doing so also on our own. Piller (2017:10) states: “Culture is not something we have [...] but something we do [...] it is also something that is done to us when others perceive us and treat us as a representative of a particular culture”: rather than saying that culture is a noun indicating an abstract concept each person own in different ways, culture could be considered “an active process of meaning making” (Street 1993: 25).

As Scollon and Scollon (1994) point out, there is a clarification to be made in regard to the word “culture” in English: in everyday contexts, this word is used to describe high culture and/or intellectual achievements. They give the examples of cities being cradles of the many types of culture and the periods of history being *high points* in cultures: for

⁶ https://www.oed.com/dictionary/culture_n?tab=meaning_and_use#7741090

⁷ https://www.oed.com/dictionary/culture_n?tab=etymology&tl=true

instance, the Elizabethan period for England. Another classic example could be the Renaissance period for the Italian peninsula (Between the 15th and 16th centuries.) Another useful example that might be added could be represented by people: those who have been able to have significant cultural achievements, such as writers (poets and novelists), inventors, artists. Scollon and Scollon remark that in the linguistic field, especially when studying intercultural communication, the term “culture” is used in an anthropological sense, indicating “any aspect of the ideas, communications, or behaviors of a group of people which gives to them a distinctive identity and which is used to organize their internal sense of cohesion and membership” (Scollon and Scollon 1994: 139-140).

There are different views on culture, representing “essentialist” and “non-essentialist” approaches. The essentialist view sees culture as “a concrete social phenomenon which represents the essential character of a particular nation” (Holliday 2000: 38): as Bradley defines: “Essentializing things (such as gases, animals, rocks) in the natural world, if one indeed believes one can, is to see groupings in nature as they actually are”. He adds that grouping people in the same way that we group chemical elements could be problematic (Bradley 2018: 2-3). Indeed, the idea of categorizing cultures in well-defined boxes could lead to stereotypes, entailing that “the belief that certain social categories (e.g., gender, race) mark fundamentally distinct kinds of people” (Rhodes et al., 2012: 13526 in Bradley 2018: 3). On the other hand, the non-essentialist view argues that the essentialist notion of cultures is “seen as socially constructed by nationalism, within Europe in the nineteenth century, and now in the developing world”, debating instead that cultures should be seen as “a resource for investigating and understanding social behaviour”, without allowing “preconceptions about national cultural characteristics to constrain the investigation”: it sees culture as “a movable concept used by different people at different times to suit purposes of identity, politics and science” (Holliday 2000: 38-40). As Hofstede (1991 in Holliday 2000: 38) says, we should be wary of national stereotyping, but the fact that there exist aspects that differentiate us should not be forgotten: as Bradley writes: stereotyping “is simply a tool of convenience” (Bradley 2018: 5), a tool that, with a deep knowledge of all the implications, could be used to teach and learn about the complexity of the many aspects surrounding culture (history, sociology etc...), however “if people thought that the categories in the stereotypes they use to make sense of the complex mass

of humanity held no water, it follows that they would likely not use them” (Bradley 2018: 5).

2.2.2 Acting Interculturally

Baker (2015) poses another issue in the IC terminology, specifically the use of the word “intercultural”. In his view, the use of this term is problematic, as it could lead to the idea that cultures have defined borders: cultures communicate while remaining distinguished from one each other. This consideration has lead different scholars to adopt the term transcultural as it “implies a less static view of cultures with transcultural communication occurring ‘through’ and ‘across’ rather than ‘between’ cultures” (Baker 2015: 24) and a more dynamic view of something that should not be described as belonging to only one nation or one population. In the case of English, it should be a common knowledge that there exist a plurality of Englishes, and it should be a common acceptance that English is not anymore a belonging of one main cultural group (Baker: 2009).

Byram too analyses the word “intercultural”, but from another point of view, taking into consideration the experience of the bilingual individual within the concept of “being intercultural”. Bilingual people might find themselves between two languages and the corresponding cultures and as a result of their knowledge, and if they were to act as interpreters for those, acts that involve a specific cultural knowledge (e.g.: specific expressions or idioms) might be undermined. Interpreters and translators tough, are taught that what is expressed by one speaker might not be transferred, or it might be, but with further explanations: the interpreters who find themselves between two different cultural identities gives a perspective on both languages and cultures with which they might not be able to identify with (Byram 2012a: 86). In Byram’s opinion, intercultural dialogues, “whether [...] a matter of ‘mere’ misunderstanding of meanings or an actual physical conflict” imply the bilingual/bicultural person role of mediator, and the intercultural person depends on those they are mediating for and is therefore limited to act as a neutral person. (Byram 2012a: 86-87).

2.2.3 IC and ELF

Although ELF is used in intercultural communication, these two phenomena have both differences and points in common. Zhu (2015 in Baker 2009: 34) notices what characterises the different approaches to IC and ELF studies. On one hand, in the IC studies have a perspective of difference: to understand interactions in IC it is important to acknowledge the existence of cultural differences. Indeed, it would not be called intercultural/ transcultural communication if differences among cultures were not real. On the other hand, ELF acts with the opposite perspective: it is important to recognize what is shared: in this case the knowledge of the English language and its use as lingua franca.

Drawing from Pietikäinen (2017) study, one can see an overlapping issue in ELF and IC. In her study she analysed the role of ELF in long term relationships: assuming that the relationships were between ELF speakers from distinct cultures, it was found that their ELF conversations were also examples of intercultural communications. Both IC and ELF have taken the misunderstanding event into consideration: on one hand IC research assumes that misunderstanding is the norm in IC (Zhu 2015 in Baker 2015:39); it is clear that communicating one's own culture to another person might lead to misunderstanding and difficulties: “translating” part of a culture into a different language is not an easy task and might lead to misunderstanding or non-understanding. In contrast, ELF research studies have established understanding as the norm (Firth 1996 in Baker 2015: 39) “despite the challenges of cultural and linguistic differences.” (Baker 2015: 39): even when ELF communication leads to difficulties in understanding, such as accents, dialects, lexicon variations, ELF speakers usually can manage to understand each other. It might be suggested that informatic tools can help speakers to gain a much more complete understanding of IC and ELF conversations: as Baker recalls, “Another clear point of convergence between intercultural communication and ELF research is an interest in what leads to successful communication” (Baker 2015: 40).

2.3 Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

In an intercultural communication context, what is brought to the field is language and culture, and for the communication to be smooth, the actors that take part should remember to act interculturally, without forgetting the influence our language and culture might have on the conversation: IC is “one domain where “culture” [...] is constructed” (Piller 2017: 10). As Baker writes: “Language certainly influences our perception of the world but it does not restrict it.”: Intercultural communication (whether with the use of ELF or not), always includes the subjective factor that compose the speakers, therefore those involved in the communication cannot be described as neutral: the cultural dimension is crucial (Baker 2011: 198-200). He add what could be considered as crucial for any language learner: it is essential to learn the role of sociocultural context, and the language, culture and communication relationship.

2.3.1 Intercultural Awareness (ICA)

It is crucial for intercultural actors to have cultural awareness: in any conversation what is important is not only the linguistic aspect, but one of the most important roles is played by culture, even between people from the same country or even the same place: as Piller states: “Culture is an ideological construct called into play by social actors to produce and reproduce social categories and boundaries [...] it is also something that is done to us when other perceive us as representatives of a particular culture” (Piller 2017: 10). Cultural differences should never be forgotten; instead, speakers should have awareness of their culture. Byram (1997:53 in Byram 2012b: 9) defines cultural awareness as: “An ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in our own and other cultures and countries.”. Every culture is different from the other: many could have many points in common, but still there is some degree of separation, so a speaker might be able to evaluate which part of their culture to show through the language used, out of respect for the person and the cultures with which they are interacting.

In a context where ELF is used as the vehicle of communication, it might be assumed that the culture related to the language used is that of English-speaking countries, though Baker (2011:202) states that “English is no longer necessarily associated with any particular community, and extends the concept to the needs of intercultural communication through English in global lingua franca contexts”. Even if it would be almost impossible to divide the relationship between the English language and its history, in ELF contexts it becomes almost a neutral tool, with the goal of transmitting the knowledge of a second or third culture. Baker (2011:202) describes ICA as a “conscious understanding of the role culturally based forms [...] can have in intercultural communication, and an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context specific manner in real time communication”. Byram’s definition of CA and Baker’s idea of ICA could be assumed to be applied to one’s own culture and the identity they are associated with but also to all those who use a foreign language in an intercultural context, even if they do not identify with the cultural aspects related to the languages (could be ELF or not). According to Byram (2012b: 10), critical CA implies a critique of “our own communities and societies as well as that of other countries. It does this because foreign language learning inevitably draws attention to other countries, where the language being learnt is spoken, and to the communities and society of those other countries”.

Being able to connect with people all over the world means that languages, cultures may come in contact or clash with each other: it is safe to assume that a big role in this was played by the English language and its influence. It could become significant to analyse how this happened, and the impact this language has on its users.

Chapter 3 Case Study: The relationship between English and Gen Z

Chapter Three will focus on analyzing the relationship between English and Gen Z. A case study through the use of a questionnaire was chosen to obtain in-depth and effective information.

3.1 Methods

The study on the possible correlation between ELF and Gen Z was conducted through a questionnaire shared online in order for it to be answered by people of this generation. The Oxford English Dictionary describes Gen Z as people born between the late 1990s and early 2010s⁸, and therefore this questionnaire was targeted towards people between 16 and 25 years of age. The survey was developed with the Google Forms service: it is made up of nineteen questions, both closed and opened items. A major advantage of this method, besides being able to collect data easily, is that as it is created online, it can be shared quickly and easily.

3.2 Results

The first part included background questions: the respondents were asked to answer about themselves. The questionnaire was answered by 40 persons, mostly of the female gender (Figure 1), and mostly between the age of 22 and 25 (Figure 2). The majority of the answers were from Italian people (Figure 3).

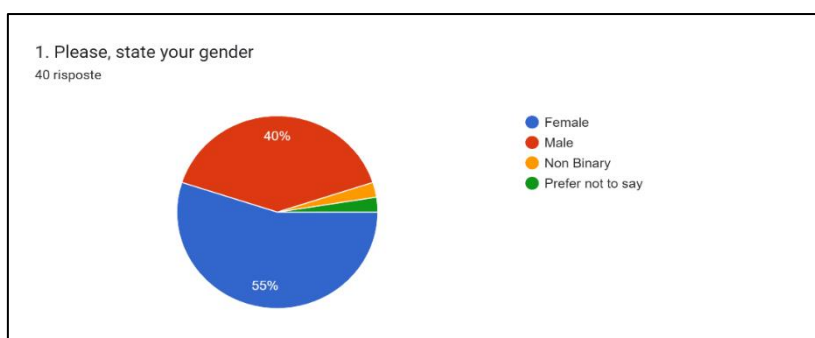


Figure 1: Answers to Question 1 of the Questionnaire

⁸ https://www.oed.com/dictionary/generation-z_n?tab=meaning_and_use#1286797140

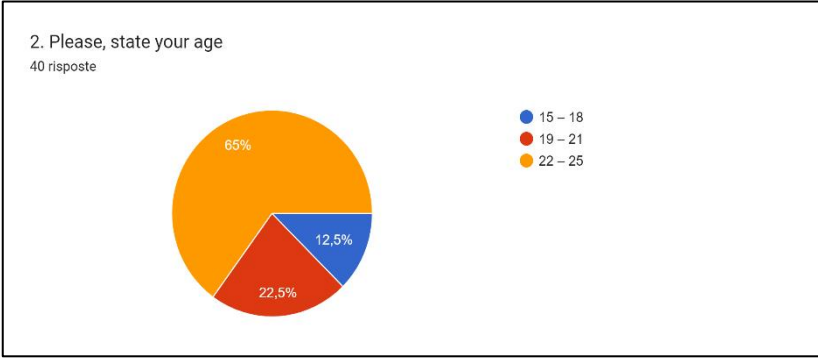


Figure 2: Answers to Question 2 of the Questionnaire

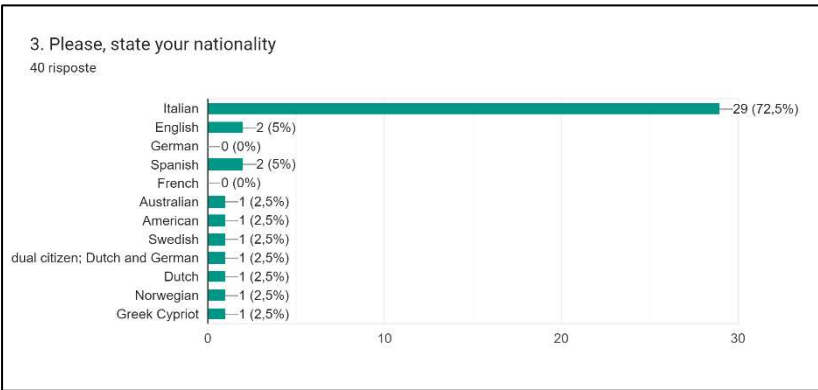


Figure 3: Answers to Question 3 of the Questionnaire

Questions 4 and 5 asked interviewees about their education level and their current situation. Figure 4 shows that the vast majority (23 responses) has at least a High School diploma, and only ten have at least a university bachelor’s degree.

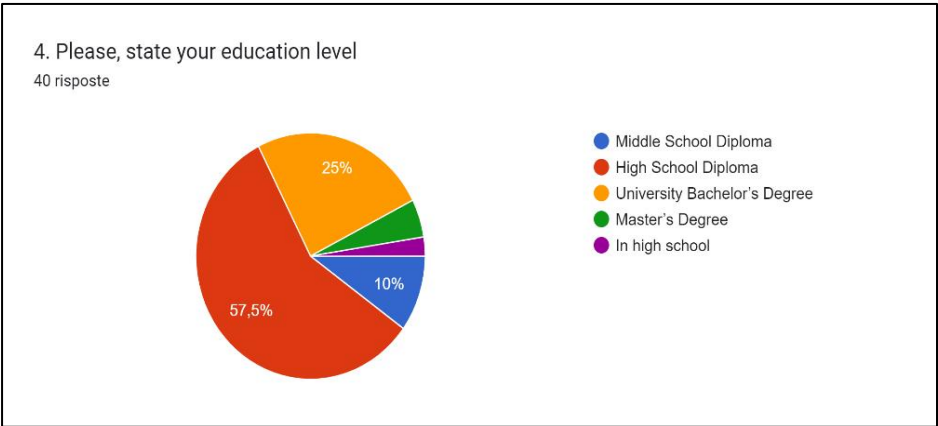


Figure 4: Answers to Question 4 of the Questionnaire

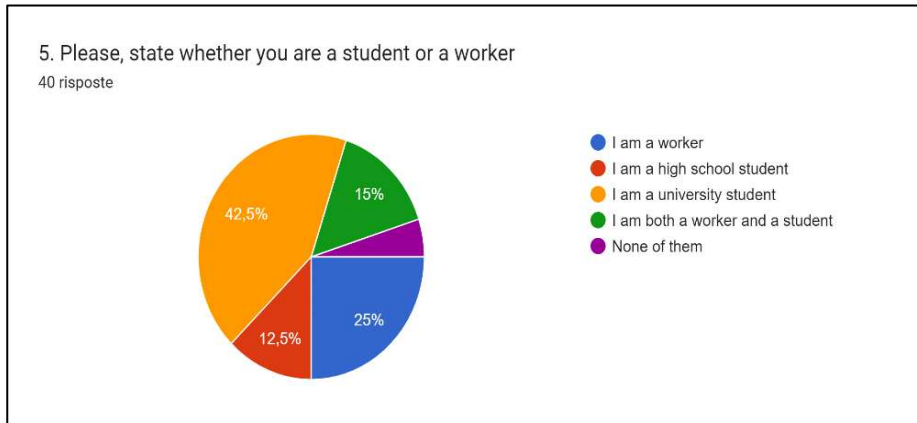


Figure 5: Answers to Question 5 of the Questionnaire

In Question 5 (Figure 5), when asked whether they are a student or a worker, 28 of the respondents indicated that they were a student, 6 of them being both a student and a worker. Of the other answers, 10 indicated worker, and 2 answered neither a worker nor a student.

Questions 6 to 8 ask respondents about their language knowledge. As can be seen in Figure 6, the overall majority of respondents reported Italian as their first language, followed by English (4 answers) and Spanish (2 answers). Figure 7 reports how the interviewees indicated their level of knowledge of the main European languages (English, Spanish, German and French). In question 8 (Figure 8) people were asked about their possible knowledge of other languages, with “No” claimed as the main answer.

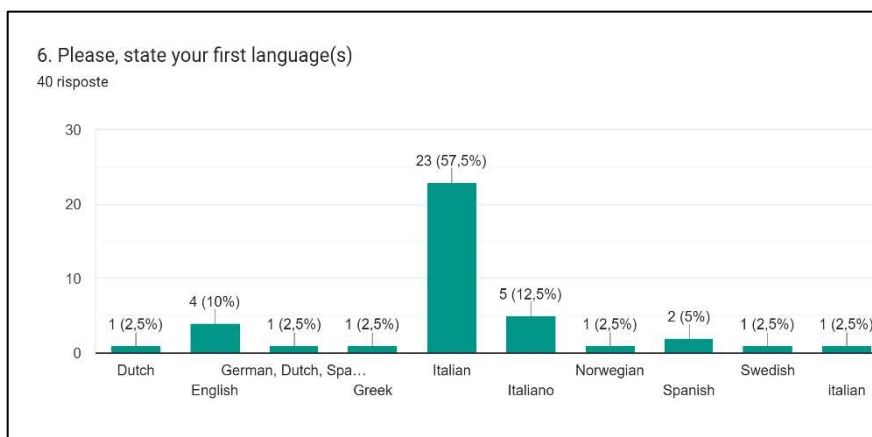


Figure 6: Answers to Question 6 of the Questionnaire

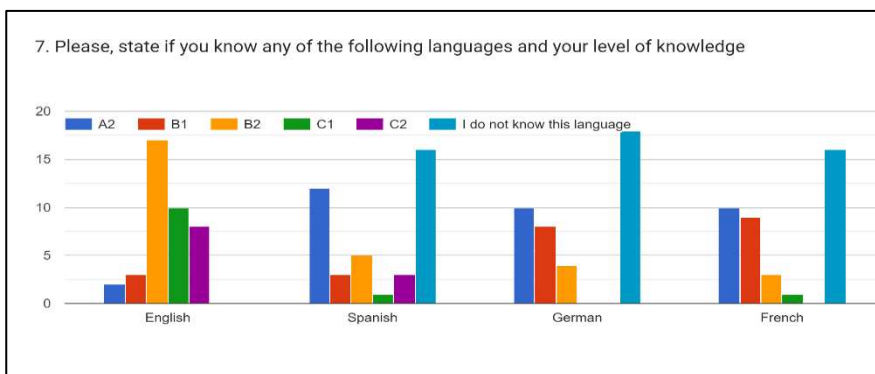


Figure 7: Answers to Question 7 of the Questionnaire

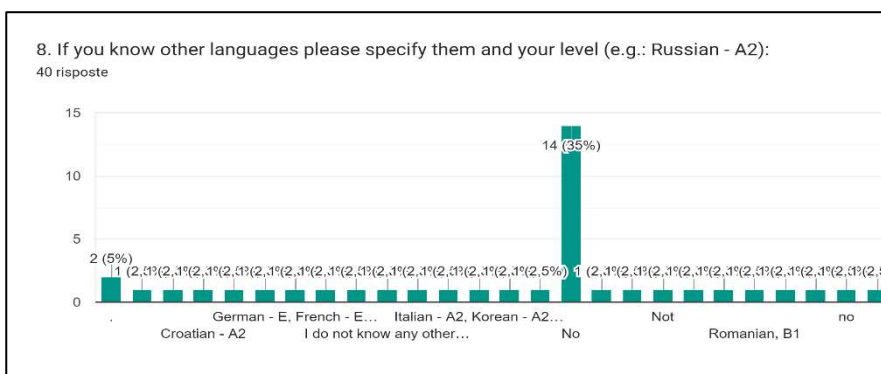


Figure 8: Answers to Question 8 of the Questionnaire

The second section of the survey was made up of questions about respondents' English studies along with questions about their English use and experience with it, and their opinion on the relationship between their generation and English. As shown in Figure 9, English is studied for a long period of time, mostly 13 years or more. A shorter period of English study was indicated by those still studying in high school and by those who indicated being from a country where English is a national language. In response to question 10 (Figure 10), half of the interviewees stated that they did not study English anymore, and 6 respondents still study English in a university degree focused on languages.

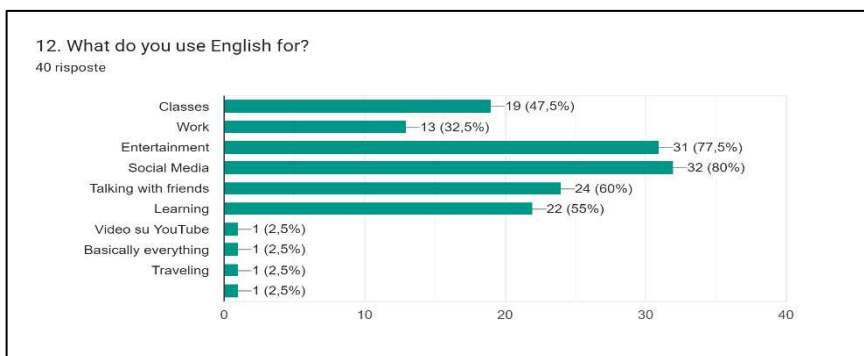


Figure 12: Answers to Question 12 of the Questionnaire

When interviewed about their use of English in question 12 (Figure 12), the most widely chosen answers were “Social Media” and “Entertainment”. As can be seen from the figure, English is used for a multitude of purposes and needs: the view of one of the answers could be echoed as a general view: English is used for “*Basically Everything*”

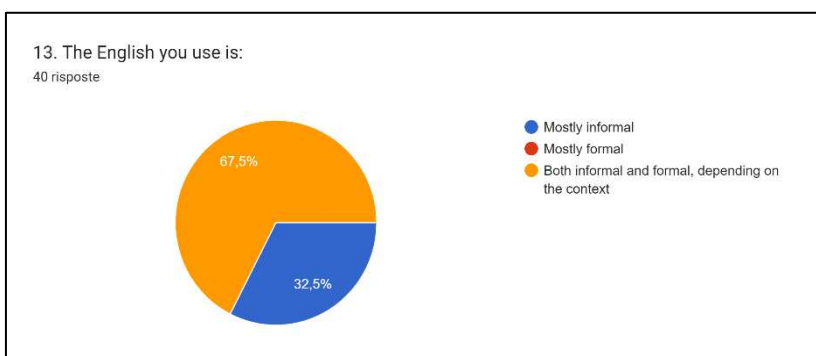


Figure 13: Answers to Question 13 of the Questionnaire

One interesting finding can be grasped in question 13 (Figure 13) and question 14 (Figure 14): participants were asked about their level of English formality and/or informality: what stands out in Figure 12 is that none of the respondents described their English as “mostly formal”; rather, the stark majority (67.75%) defined their English as “Both informal and formal, depending on the context” with the rest of respondents affirming that their English is “mostly informal”. Further analysis in question 14 (Figure 13) shows how respondents’ formal English differs from informal English: the most frequently chosen answer was “Vocabulary differences”, followed by “Reduced/contracted forms e.g. I’m, uni”.

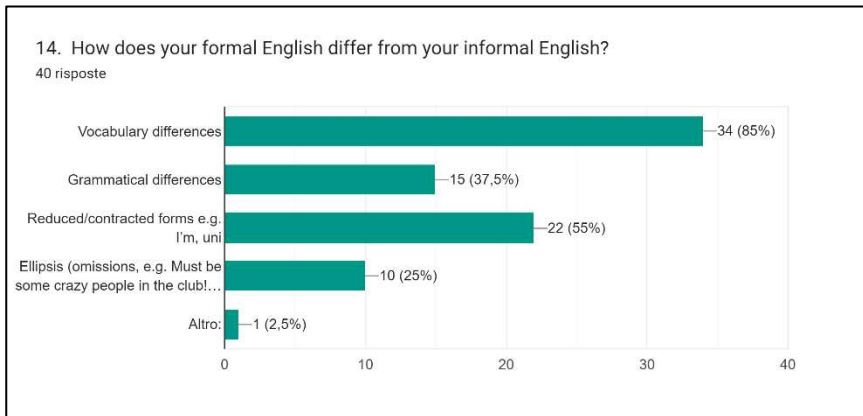


Figure 14: Answers to Question 14 of the Questionnaire

Turning to the following result, in question 15 interviewees were asked to describe briefly which English words they use while speaking their first language (Figure 15). This question was mostly targeted to people that do not speak English as their first language, yet points in common can be seen between English as a foreign language speakers and English as a first language speakers: both groups selected “Slang Words” and “Everyday Words”, both answers in which my experience is reflected. This question was both a closed and open item, where participants had the opportunity to add their own experiences: one respondent answered: “*I mix both languages a lot, sometimes I forget what the word I’m looking to use is and usually use the other language’s version of it.*”. In my opinion, this experience was unanticipatedly unpopular although still 18 respondents answered: “I Italianize English words”.

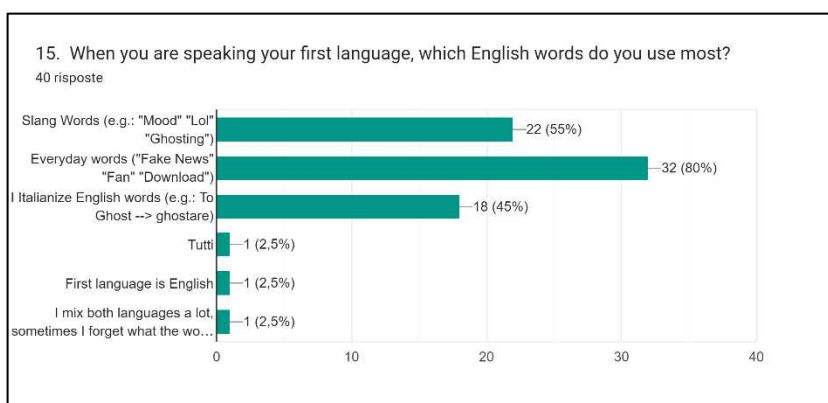


Figure 15: Answers to Question 15 of the Questionnaire

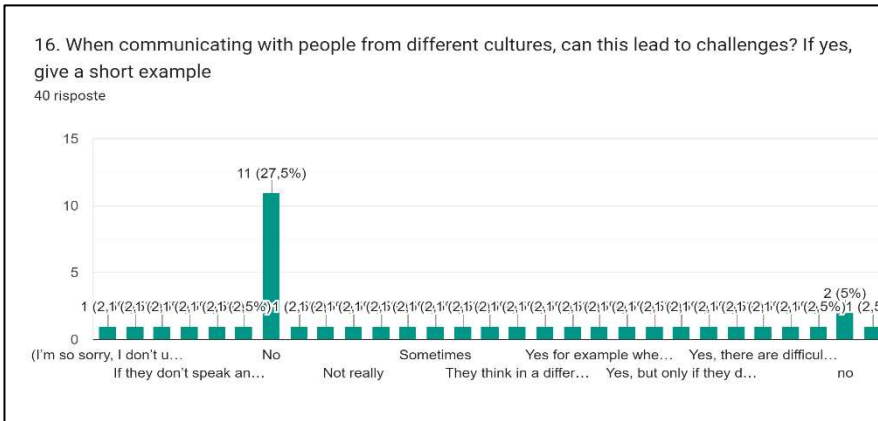


Figure 16: Answers to Question 16 of the Questionnaire

Turning now to the participants' own experiences, question 16 asked whether communication across cultures could lead to challenges, asking for a short example. Although the answers were mixed, those who answered positively gave as examples some linguistic barriers and those cultural aspects strictly related to linguistic aspects. Some respondents commented that it could be difficult to translate specific words that are related to local knowledge or the problem of translating slang or idiomatic expressions.

Question 17 asked respondents their opinion on the extent to which the English language has an impact on other languages on a scale from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (To a great extent).

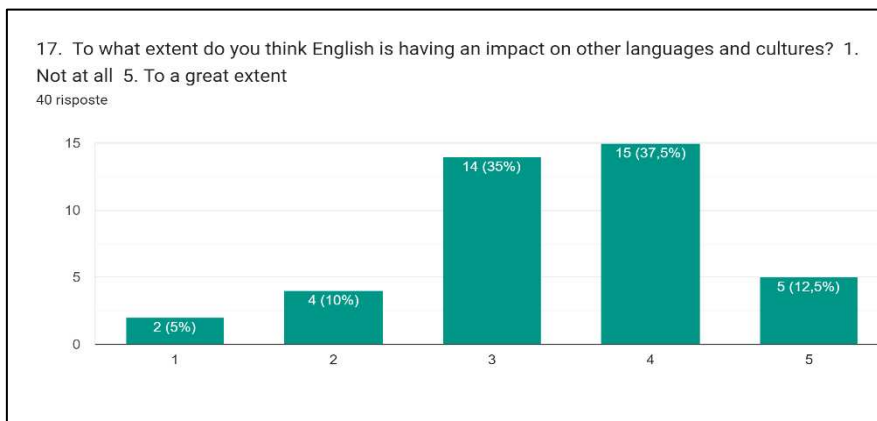


Figure 17: Answers to Question 17 of the Questionnaire

As can be seen from the data in Figure 17, this question received mostly positive answers, with 34 participants responding with 3 or more.

In question 18 (Figure 18), participants were asked to give their opinion on 5 statements.

1. Language, cultures and identity are correlated
2. Language, cultures and identity influence each other
3. When speaking English, I feel different as a person
4. Gen Z has a close connection with English
5. The Internet has a major role in how English is spoken

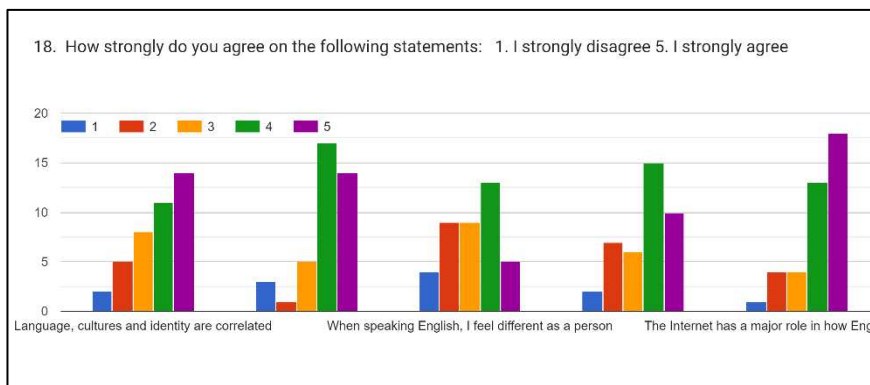


Figure 18: Answers to Question 18 of the Questionnaire

All the statements received positive answers: Gen Z members agree that they have a strong connection with the English language and that the internet has a strong role in the way the language is spoken: these results could be related to the need of Gen Z to learn English in order to engage with the digital world.

In the last question, participants were asked to give their opinion on the English language. Respondents had different comments: but a common theme, as one of the interviewees commented was that “*English is crucial*”: different participants expressed a positive opinion on the English language, as it has changed communication for the better: “*we could communicate with everyone everywhere*”. It is crucial especially in the online world:

drawing from one participant's comment: "*you find things so much easier online that way*"

3.3 Discussion

Overall, the findings of the questionnaire were what I expected. The investigation shows how deeply connected Gen Z and English are: although the number of respondents might be too small to make a generalization, question 11 (Figure 11) indicated that even if English might not be the first language, it is still very much used, even every day of the week (it should be remembered thought that the questionnaire was even answered by people who indicated English as their first language, that would clearly use English every day). In this sense, the following question (Figure 12) reports that indeed English is a widely used language, for a vastly different variety of needs: as one participant responded, for "*Basically Everything*". A possible explanation for this result might be drawn from Hülmbauer: English users, aware of the efficacy of the language can adapt it to their own personal needs and wants (Hülmbauer: 2008:3). Another explanation that could be given is that English is becoming the medium of choice: in different contexts it could happen that it turns into the only option (Seidlhofer 2011:7), enabling people to connect with each other "based on common interests and concerns across languages and communities." (Seidlhofer et al., 2006: 5).

Considering again the responses to question 12 (Figure 12), as the main response of use of English was "Social Media", taking Piller's (2017:10) words of doing culture rather than having it, it could be affirmed that Gen Z members are "doing ELF culture" using English culture, possibly implying that they could choose to stop the acting outside the social media world. However, reflecting on the spread and use of English (Question 11,15,18; Figure 11,15,18) ELF speakers rarely stop "doing" English culture: they might use some common or uncommon English words or, taking one participant's experience, mixing languages, or transforming English words to be adapted to each L1 rules ("Italianizing" in the case of Italian speakers). These intriguing results could reflect Mauranen's (2018:107-109) studies: in recent years English speakers have been able to

collect features from both L1 and the English language recognizing similarities and differences and surpassing them, possibly creating what, with further studies, might be in the future described as a new language. Drawing from Piller's (2017:10) words, Gen Z's intercultural communication is "one domain where "culture" [...] is constructed" (Piller 2017: 10). What is more intriguing and a possible field of study is *how* this happened: ELF, adapted to each person's needs and wants (Hülmbauer: 2008:3), has not been created at the table with people deciding and arguing on how to speak ELF. It is something that goes beyond generational culture, or the culture of each single ELF user: it could be said that Gen Z's ELF is not something culturally neutral; rather it is a phenomenon that goes beyond the common definitions of culture. Considering the answers given in questions 11, 12, 15 and 18 (Figures 11, 12, 15, 18), it could be said that the strong relationship between the English language, culture and identity claimed by participants is something that would need a further and improved study on a larger scale, as the experience an first language speaker might have is different from the experience of a learner of English speaker.

3.4 Conclusion

In this paper the aim was to investigate the relationship between ELF and its GenZ speakers, starting from a focus on the subjects studied: what is ELF and analyzing the current research on the relationship among language, culture and identity, focusing on Intercultural Communication. The case study analysed shows that a relationship exists, and it is strong. Although the range of respondents could be said to be small, with a wider audience, research on the bond between cultures, languages, and identity could be particularly important not to generate rules or artificially structured regulations, but to explore the spontaneous acts that lead to the creations of cultural acts. Studies that focus on these types of events might be used in the future for historical and documentation purposes. In the past centuries cultures from all around the world would have taken a long period of time to meet and merge, but, to conclude, it could be said that right now, thanks to the internet, and to the Intercultural Communication of Gen Z, we are in the middle of an event in which possibly thousands of different cultures are coming into contact with each other every day. As a consequence, these are capable of merging very rapidly,

possibly creating a new type of culture that could have a very significant impact in the future.

Conclusion

The aim of this dissertation was to analyse the relationship between ELF and its Gen Z users, starting in Chapter One with an analysis of the concept and the definitions of ELF and the different attitudes toward it, the uses and the studies that have been made on it. Chapter Two focused then on language, culture and identity and the connection that can be said to exist between the three aspects of our lives; it then went through a review of the research carried out on the idea Intercultural Communication and Intercultural Communication acts. Finally, in Chapter Three were reported and then analysed the result of the questionnaire proposed.

The case study's most interesting result, drawn from the participants' answers and comments, can be found in importance of the English language. We live in a digital world that grants us the ability to connect with each other all around the world who has selected the English as the lingua franca, so a basic knowledge of it could be said to be necessary also for many different purposes and needs, such as travelling, or entertainment. This could be said as there is a generation of people, Gen Z, that has seen the birth and exponential growth of digital and social instruments that have created a potentially indestructible web of cultures and languages.

The main limitation to this study is the range of respondents: I had the opportunity to investigate the experiences and opinions of 40 members of Gen Z, but, however, I believe that a wider range of answers could be useful and used as a base for further and more in-depth analysis not limited to ELF or the English language. An additional limitation was the variety of the languages spoken by the respondents: three of them claimed to speak English as a first language: had I received answers from a higher number of English native speakers, a comparison could have been made between non-native English speakers and native English speakers.

Nonetheless, a focus on this type of research could shed light on the collective and spontaneous natural acts carried out by Gen Z that lead to such great expansion of the use

of English as a Lingua Franca: as it is a generation with a strong connection with the digital and the internet world and, it could be affirmed that Gen Z is the main actor of these cultural changes: not in a negative way, but with a positive light that could eventually be used to understand cultural and language changes that happened in the past. Further studies could explore how unprompted the embracing of the English language in the internet world came to be, they could be helpful also to understand how and why people chose to mix their language with the English language.

As previously mentioned, it could be said that we are capable of seeing culture merging and changing with an incredible speed, so future studies might help us understand past changes in languages and cultures, and even predict what could happen in the future of languages.

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Riassunto

Lo scopo di questo lavoro è quello di analizzare come la lingua inglese può influenzare le lingue madri di chi parla *anche* inglese: se e come l'inglese interessano la percezione dell'uso di una lingua e l'identità culturale. Analizzando l'esperienza della Generazione Z, lo scopo finale è quello di scoprire se e come le identità culturali sono toccate dall'espansione globale dell'inglese. Per condurre questa ricerca, è stato organizzato un questionario rivolto a persone che per data di nascita sono considerate parte della "Generazione Z (quindi nati a fine anni '90 e i primi anni 2000)": si chiede di rispondere ad alcune domande sul loro uso dell'inglese, la loro idea di cultura e identità, e come questi elementi possono essere interconnessi. La domanda a cui vorrei provare a rispondere è: se e come questa generazione e l'uso che fa della lingua inglese possono giocare un ruolo nella percezione dell'identità culturale.

Il primo capitolo "*A global use of English*" si propone di analizzare come prima cosa l'impatto che ha avuto la lingua inglese e la sua grande espansione fino a diventare la lingua più parlata al mondo e de facto la lingua franca in molti contesti, da quelli più ufficiali come le diverse organizzazioni internazionali, a contesti meno ufficiali, come il mondo del web. Considerando che nel mondo esistono centinaia di lingue diverse, da sempre è esistito il bisogno di una lingua franca che potesse essere usata per scopi di comunicazione, commercio, scambio di culture o diplomazia. Nel primo capitolo viene analizzato il concetto di "*English as a Lingua Franca*" (ELF): inglese come lingua franca: il suo ruolo di lingua franca non è stato deciso a tavolino da una comunità: per diversi motivi, storici e geografici l'inglese lo è diventata. A seguire il primo capitolo analizza le diverse interpretazioni che sono state date nel corso degli anni riguardo il concetto di ELF e soprattutto chi parla Inglese come lingua franca. A prima vista si potrebbe dire che viene utilizzato da chi non parla inglese come lingua madre con altre persone che non parlano inglese come lingua madre: in questo modo però vengono escluse le persone che hanno inglese come lingua madre. Un parlante inglese del Regno Unito può avere il bisogno di parlare con un abitante dalla Germania che parla tedesco e inglese: viene quindi usata la lingua in comune tra i due, in questo caso l'inglese. L'abitante del Regno Unito avrà quindi il vantaggio di poter parlare la sua lingua madre. Dato il grande numero

di persone che parlano inglese (come seconda lingua o come lingua straniera), è molto probabile che due persone che non condividono la stessa lingua madre condividano invece la conoscenza della lingua inglese: si può dire che è la lingua inglese è diventata l'opzione migliore, e più accessibile.

Il capitolo continua analizzando dove e come l'ELF viene utilizzato. Lo scopo principale dell'inglese utilizzato come lingua franca è quello della comunicazione: non solo per la comunicazione faccia a faccia (in presenza o attraverso una piattaforma di comunicazione), ma ha diversi scopi. Un esempio è lo scambio di informazioni: per avere una organizzazione omogenea la comunità scientifica utilizza l'inglese per la pubblicazione di ricerche; viene utilizzato oltretutto per interagire nel mondo digitale: per la musica, per conoscere nuove persone e per piacere personale.

Il primo capitolo conclude studiando l'utilizzo dell'inglese come lingua franca all'interno dell'Unione Europea. L'UE si propone di promuovere il multilinguismo, uno scopo nobile aiutato dal fatto che adotta le lingue dei suoi paesi membri come lingue ufficiali dell'Unione quando questi ne diventano parte: anche l'Inglese lo è diventato, assumendo de facto il ruolo non ufficialmente riconosciuto di lingua franca nell'Unione. Questo ha portato alla conoscenza della lingua inglese percepita come un sapere necessario: difatti il saper parlare inglese viene vista all'interno dell'Unione come una necessità basilica.

Il secondo capitolo "*The communication among culture, language and identity*" si occupa di analizzare la connessione esistente tra lingua, cultura e identità. Come prima cosa analizza il significato di cultura e il ruolo di una lingua. Si potrebbe dire che ogni viviamo tanti tipi di cultura, dalla cultura personale della passione per uno sport alla cultura nazionale: ogni giorno una persona può decidere di interagire in diverse parti della sua cultura. Per far ciò può aver bisogno di utilizzare un linguaggio particolare che la identifica come parte di quella determinata cultura, che può andare da una come quella di uno sport o una attività di pasticceria o una cultura nazionale. Il secondo capitolo continua analizzando proprio il molteplice ruolo di una lingua: oltre ad essere un comune mezzo di comunicazione, si può definire come il veicolo di una cultura: attraverso di essa possiamo creare atti culturali riguardanti cose che esistono o che non esistono, scambiarsi informazioni e così dicendo in un processo culturale, creativo e continuo.

La seconda parte del secondo capitolo mette luce sul concetto di “*Intercultural Communication*” (IC). Poiché il concetto di IC a prima vista potrebbe non essere immediato, è importante come prima cosa capire i termini utilizzati, partendo dallo studio il significato del termine cultura. Si potrebbe affermare che un bambino appena nato non abbia una cultura, anche se, inconsciamente, possiede la cultura della famiglia e del paese in cui nasce, ovviamente però non è in grado di comprendere e immagazzinarle. Queste conoscenze verranno poi cresciute e sviluppate, in primis con l’aiuto della famiglia e del sistema educativo. Una persona poi è potenzialmente in grado di sviluppare infinite piccole culture che, sommate, andranno a far parte di un bagaglio culturale che si potrebbe potenzialmente definire come infinito. La seconda parte conclude analizzando il significato di “*Intercultural*”: agire in maniera interculturale potrebbe implicare l’esistenza di bordi tra culture statici e ben definiti, si preferirebbe quindi l’uso del termine “*transcultural*”: una comunicazione tra culture piuttosto che da una cultura all’altra.

Il secondo capitolo si conclude studiando l’ “*Intercultural Awareness*” (ICA): la consapevolezza interculturale: chi partecipa ad atti di comunicazione interculturale deve avere una ampia consapevolezza, non solo dal punto di vista linguistico, ma anche dal punto di vista culturale. Le differenze tra culture, che siano tra culture molto distanti o molto vicine non dovrebbero essere mai dimenticate. In un simile contesto si potrebbe pensare quindi che l’ELF sia quindi che si trasmetta allo stesso tempo la cultura dei paesi parlanti inglese. Ciononostante, anche se sarebbe impossibile dividere la lingua inglese dalla sua storia e dalla storia delle popolazioni che l’hanno adottata, in contesti interculturali l’ELF diventa quasi una lingua neutra, uno strumento neutrale utilizzato per la trasmissione di culture, siano esse collegate alla lingua inglese che non.

Il terzo e ultimo capitolo “*Case Study: The relationship between English and Gen Z*” si occupa di riportare e analizzare i risultati dello studio eseguito. Lo studio sul possibile rapporto tra ELF e la Generazione Z è stato condotto attraverso l’analisi di un questionario online creato con il servizio “*Google Forum*” per la sua facile condivisione e poi analisi. Il questionario è stato indirizzato alle persone della Gen. Z, quindi tra i 16 e 25 anni.

Il questionario è composto di 19 domande divise in due parti: la prima include diverse domande personali sui partecipanti: domande personali e sulle loro conoscenze

linguistiche. Il questionario è stato risposto da 40 persone. La maggioranza si identifica come donna; per la maggior parte è stato compilato da persone tra i 22 e i 25 anni. La seconda parte del questionario è composta da domande riguardanti gli studi pregressi o attuali dei partecipanti, la loro opinione riguardante la loro generazione e il rapporto che ha con l'inglese, e la lingua inglese in generale.

Lo studio dimostra che una relazione tra ELF e Gen Z esiste, ed è forte. Studi sul rapporto tra lingua, cultura e identità possono diventare di particolare interesse non per creare regole stabilite posteriormente a tavolino, ma per motivi di documentazione o anche per esplorare gli atti spontanei che portano alla creazione di nuovi atti culturali: d'altronde, i linguaggi e l'ELF che vengono usati nel mondo digitale, che sia da parte della Gen Z o meno non sono linguaggi stati stabiliti artificialmente e scientemente da un gruppo di persone preciso e con certe caratteristiche: poiché l'inglese viene usato ormai per qualsiasi tipo di bisogno, chi lo parla ha semplicemente deciso di sfruttarlo e farlo proprio. Nel passato le diverse culture impiegavano anni per incontrarsi e poi mescolarsi, adesso, grazie al mondo digitale e agli atti interculturali spontanei della Gen Z, assistiamo a centinaia di culture che con molta rapidità nascono, si incontrano e si mescolano facendone nascere di nuove.

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