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Your language or mine? or English as a lingua franca? Comparing effectiveness in English as a lingua franca and L1–L2 interactions: implications for corporate language policies

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For multinational corporations, the need for efficiency and control has motivated the choice for a corporate language. However, increasing internationalisation has forced corporations to rethink their language policies to cater to the changing demands of the multicultural and multilingual workplace. This paper explores two related issues. First, it addresses the influence of mode of communication (English as a Lingua Franca [ELF] vs. L1–L2 interactions) on task efficiency. Second, it investigates the use of communication strategies in the different types of interactions (ELF vs. L1–L2). In a within-subject experimental design, the present study explores the effectiveness of language use in dyadic, computer-mediated communication between non-native speakers of English (ELF) and native and non-native speakers of German and Dutch (L1–L2). In three consecutive chat sessions, 60 participants performed a problem-solving task in English, German or Dutch. Findings indicate that in L1–L2 interactions, the participants were more effective in realising communicative goals than in ELF interactions, and that participants made use of different communication strategies in L1–L2 interactions than in ELF interactions. Consequently, international organisations which implement a corporate language may benefit from condoning multilingual practices on the work floor.

Keywords: multilingualism; ELF; computer-mediated communication; communication strategies; language policy; language use

Introduction

For many multinational corporations (MNCs), the need for efficiency and control has motivated the choice for language standardisation, i.e. the use of a single corporate language, often English. A few decades ago, when international communication mainly concerned individuals in the upper echelons of organisations, the implementation of a corporate language may have been difficult but feasible. Today, as a result of international job mobility of staff, MNCs are faced with increasing multicultural and multilingual workforces across all hierarchical layers in the company, which means the decision to use a corporate language affects employees throughout the company. In addition, advances in information technology have facilitated international communication within and between organisations, subsidiaries and business units (Janssens, Lambert, and Steyaert 2004). In view of the exponential growth of the number of users involved in various types of

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computer-mediated communication (CMC) activities for (inter)national interactions (e.g. Tworoger et al. 2013) on a daily basis (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, MSN), the purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of language choice in CMC interactions.

Business communication research has demonstrated that despite a corporate (monolingual) language policy, communication in companies is often multilingual, with several languages coexisting alongside the corporate language in the workplace (Angouri 2013; Kingsley 2013; Lüdi, Höchle, and Yanaprasart 2010; MacKenzie 2012).

Although the use of a corporate lingua franca may facilitate global communication in multilingual settings, it may also present linguistic, cultural and organisational challenges for those who are non-native speakers of the corporate language. For instance, Welch, Welch, and Piekkari (2005) showed that, although knowledge transfer and information processes are considered of paramount importance to internationally operating companies, language often remains a 'forgotten factor' in many multinational organisations in that organisations often overlook the (immaterial) costs and consequences of the implementation of a single corporate language. The use of a corporate language may exclude non-native staff lacking adequate proficiency from communication processes, and, conversely, put considerable power into the hands of those individuals or units that do possess the required language skills (Welch et al. 2005). In her analysis of international business meetings, Rogerson-Revell (2008) showed that the use of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) may lead to feelings of frustration in meetings and that a considerable proportion of non-native participants were inactive in ELF meetings. Participants tend to have negative perceptions about their own contributions (Rogerson-Revell 2008). Language may even cause a divide between those who are proficient and those who are not (Gunnarsson 2014).

The fact that everyday multilingual practice is not in line with the language policy as enforced by the organisation may prompt organisations to readjust or reconsider their corporate language policy. In view of the coexistence of multilingualism and corporate language policy, there is a need for research investigating the effectiveness of alternative modes of communication in organisations, and other cross-border interactions. In interactions involving individuals with different linguistic backgrounds, speakers have at least two options with regard to choice of language. They can choose to communicate in a lingua franca, i.e. a language that is not the mother tongue of any of the participants, or in the mother tongue of one of the interactants (L1–L2). Thus, both ELF and L1–L2 interactions require at least one speaker to communicate in a second language and overcome any concomitant linguistic challenges in the negotiation of meaning.

In second language acquisition (SLA) research, much attention has been paid to the way second-language learners use communication strategies to counter for linguistic problems when communicating in a second language and the rich SLA research tradition has produced a warmly debated set of taxonomies with different classifications of communication strategies as used by learners of all levels of proficiency. These communication strategies have been inventoried notably for L2 learners (e.g. Dörnyei and Scott 1997; Nakatani 2006; Nakatani and Goh 2007 for an overview). Communication strategies are considered to be cognitive processes involved in the use of the (foreign) target language, both in reception and production. Tarone (1980) defines communication strategies as 'mutual attempt[s] of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared' (419). SLA research on communication strategies has predominantly focused on language learning, rather than language use. This research has largely focused on describing and classifying the strategies employed by learners and on identifying factors that influence

strategy choice, such as learners' proficiency level, personality, learning situation, as well as the nature of the task being performed (Ellis 1994). Following suggestions made by Seidlhofer (2001), our intention is to explore the communication tactics used by interlocutors in solving referential communication problems from the perspective of language use rather than language learning.

The discussion with regard to language choice (standardisation or adaptation) in communication may benefit from advances made in SLA research in that the communication strategies identified in SLA studies may shed light on how language choice impacts the effectiveness of communication in multicultural settings. Therefore, the present study explored the effectiveness of ELF versus another mode of communication, namely L1–L2 communication, and investigated differences in the use of communication strategies in the two types of interactions. In view of the importance of advanced technology for international organisational communication, this study focused on CMC interactions in particular. Several studies (e.g. Iwasaki and Oliver 2003; Smith 2003; Thoms, Liao and Szustak 2005) have pointed out that in CMC, participants negotiate for meaning in ways similar to those found in face-to-face interaction.

ELF and linguistic balance

The advantage of using ELF, at least according to some authors (House 2007; Louhiala-Salminen, Charles and Kankaanranta 2005; Mauranen 2006; Seidlhofer 2002), is that there is no linguistic imbalance between those who are fluent and those who are not, or less fluent, in ELF. Linguistic fluency is often associated with power, and if all speakers in an interaction consider themselves to be comparable in fluency in the language of the interaction, they are likely to perceive the communication situation as equally balanced with regard to linguistic power. Admittedly, even among ELF users, possible differences in fluency may lead to some speakers having more linguistic power than others. In this paper, we regard ELF as a language that has no native speakers.

ELF versus L1–L2

A disadvantage of using a lingua franca (often ELF) is that none of the participants seem to have the benefit of mother tongue proficiency. This means that all interactants may experience similar difficulties verbalising the fine-grained details of reality, which may ultimately impair the quality of the interaction. It is not inconceivable that this lack of refinement may affect the effectiveness of communication. This is precisely what was empirically shown by Hincks (2010), who found that speakers needed 26.5% more time to deliver the same presentations in English than in their mother tongue. In other words, using ELF also has the disadvantage that it may take considerably more time than using mother tongue communication. This is an aspect that seems to be overlooked when English is adopted as a corporate language following international mergers (although admittedly, in corporate settings, decisions about the adoption of ELF may be prompted by other than linguistic reasons).

In L1–L2 interactions, with speakers adopting the native language of one of the interactants, the mother tongue speaker has the strategic advantage of native speaker proficiency, which may create a linguistically unbalanced situation. At the same time, however, the non-native speaker(s) in L1–L2 interactions may benefit from the more advanced mother tongue proficiency of the native speaker, who may have a more sophisticated linguistic repertoire to verbalise messages. If non-native interlocutors have,

at least, a working knowledge of the target language in question, they can 'lean on' the language proficiency of the mother tongue speaker. This collaborative effort of native and non-native interlocutors may improve both the quality and the effectiveness of L1–L2 interactions compared to ELF interaction. This process has been labelled 'scaffolding' (Thoms et al. 2005; see also Lee 2008, 2009) and refers to the interaction between a more knowledgeable individual and a less experienced person: 'In communication contexts, scaffolding occurs when a native speaker (the expert) is paired with a less knowledgeable student' (Thoms et al. 2005, 164).[1]

A study investigating differences in efficiency between ELF interactions and L1–L2 interactions is Van Engen et al.'s (2010), which examined the effect of accentedness on communicative efficiency in terms of task completion time and word-to-token ratio. Van Engen et al. found that native speakers of English in combination with non-native speakers (i.e. L1–L2 English dyads) were more efficient in carrying out a spot-the-differences task than ELF dyads. These findings suggest that L1–L2 interactions, in which there is an element of linguistic imbalance between the L1 mother tongue interactant and the L2 (non-native) interactant, may be more effective.

A prerequisite for the potentially beneficial effect of the linguistic imbalance in L1–L2 interactions is that the non-native interlocutor should possess sufficient knowledge of the native speaker's language. Fortunately, in many neighbouring countries in Europe, this is the case. The Netherlands and Germany are examples of countries where residents of both countries often possess a basic knowledge of the neighbouring country's mother tongue. German and Dutch share a common linguistic background, and linguistic similarities between the languages are also perceived as such by speakers of German and Dutch (Ház 2005; see Odlin and Jarvis [2004] for the importance of perceived linguistic similarities between languages).

In summary, the use of ELF has been argued to have advantages and disadvantages in terms of effectiveness. Moreover, no research to date has actually measured the effectiveness of ELF interactions versus other modes of communication, such as L1–L2 interactions.

Effectiveness

In ELF research, effectiveness is characteristically defined in terms of achieving mutual understanding through co-creating meaning (e.g. Cogo and Dewey 2006; Hülmbauer 2007; Jenkins, Cogo, and Dewey 2011). Others have defined effectiveness as communicative success to refer to the extent to which respondents think they have achieved particular communicative goals (e.g. Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen 2010). Dannerer (2005) identified a range of parameters of efficient communication among which were time needed, understanding, and the establishment of mutual goals.

In view of the fact that we aimed to compare the effectiveness of two communication modes, we needed a more quantifiable operationalisation. Accordingly, effectiveness was defined in two ways: time needed and communicative goals achieved. When time is limited, as is often the case in professional communication, effectiveness can be determined by the amount of time needed to achieve a certain communicative goal, which is what Van Engen et al. (2010) investigated. Therefore, our first definition of effectiveness was the number of communicative goals achieved within a delimited time span as a measure of effectiveness.

Another measure of effectiveness might be the number of words needed by interactants to achieve their communicative goal. Non-native interlocutors have been

found to be more verbose than native interlocutors (Edmondson and House 1991). Since non-native speakers feel insecure, due to their limited access to linguistic and pragmatic resources in the target language, and because they may feel intimidated by the native speaker, they have a tendency to 'waffle' (Edmondson and House 1991). Therefore, our second definition of effectiveness was the number of words required to achieve communicative goals. We expected L2 and ELF speakers to be more verbose than L1 speakers.

Communication strategies in foreign language use

Interactions involving non-native speakers (ELF or L1–L2) may differ not only in effectiveness but also in the range of strategies that speakers employ to solve referential conflicts. In communicative settings where interlocutors are obliged to communicate in a foreign language, speakers are known to resort to communication strategies to achieve successful communication. Moreover, the choices interlocutors make from the variety of communication strategies at the disposal of the language user allow them to shape their individual non-native language identities. For example, an interlocutor making abundant use of appealing for help strategies may want to indicate that he/she is not afraid of depending on his or her interlocutor to create meaning.

In the present study, we used a taxonomy of communication strategies (see Table 1) that combined elements of classifications from a number of sources (Bialystok 1990; Dörnyei and Scott 1997; Faerch and Kasper 1983; Poulisse 1989; Tarone 1980). Although there are many differences between face-to-face interactions and chat interactions, for example, with regard to contextual, non-verbal and paralinguistic cues, there are also many similarities, for instance, with regard to synchronicity and formality (Etzioni and Etzioni 1999). More importantly, Smith (2003) showed that communication strategies can also be detected in ELF computer-mediated interactions and that the taxonomies developed by SLA researchers should be extended with strategies that are typical of CMC interactions.

ELF research is less concerned with language learning than with language use (cf. Firth and Wagner 1997). Mautner (1999), for example, stresses that learners of business English view language as a means to an end and have no interest in language per se. These non-native speakers need to get their messages across and are less concerned with lexical or grammatical correctness. In this perspective, communicative effectiveness may be an important criterion for success. In the present study, the non-native user, rather than the non-native learner, is our prime concern. The analysis of strategies used by non-native language users may benefit from insights developed in SLA research with regard to strategies used by language learners.

All the strategies in our taxonomy (see Table 1) can be regarded as attempts at communicative collaboration. The first set of strategies (Table 1) draw attention to a communicative deficiency experienced by the speaker. Examples are comprehension checks ('Do I understand this correctly'), self-corrections ('Do you have stwraberries? strawberries?'), appealing for assistance ('What do you call it?'), signalling linguistic deficiency ('Next to the … uh … floppy?') and signalling insecurity ('I'm afraid my English is not very good').

Strategies seven and eight are used when a speaker anticipates any problems the hearer might have. Examples of these strategies are comprehension checks directed at the recipient ('Do you understand?'), offering help ('four strawberries, these red fruits') and signalling miscomprehension ('or do you mean paperclip?').

Table 1. Communication strategies.

Strategy		Description and example
Speaker-oriented	1. Comprehension check (self)	Speaker checks whether he/she has correctly understood the message; *so we have 3 things different so far right?*
	2. Self-correction	Speaker restates or retypes the same message: *do you have also strwaberries? *strawberries*
	3. Appealing for assistance	Speaker explicitly asks for help: *what do you call it?*
	4. Signalling linguistic deficiency	*I don't know what the English word is*
	5. Signalling insecurity	*I'm afraid my English isn't very good*
	6. Signalling misunderstanding	*I don't know if that is what you mean? or do you mean paperclip?*
Hearer-oriented	7. Comprehension check (other)	Speaker explicitly checks whether interlocutor has correctly understood the message; *do you know what i mean with limes?*
	8. Offering assistance	Speaker offers help *on the right, are there also some peaches? orange fruits?*
Message-oriented	9. Compensatory strategies	a. Use of superordinates: *under the big yellow fruit* b. Description: *a little plastic thing for medicine*
	Process-oriented:	
	a. Generalisation	a. *a cumcumber* (for cucumber)
	b. Circumlocution, paraphrase	b. *an photoapparat* (for camera) c. *and teeth brush and pasta* (for tooth paste)
	Linguistic encoding	
	a. Word coinage	
	b. Foreignising, literal translation	
	c. Code switching	
Interaction-oriented	10. Paralinguistic	a. *THE SECOND DIFFERENCE*
	a. use of capitals	b. *;-)*
	b. use of emoticons	c. *jeej* d. *???*
	c. onomatopoeia	
	d. punctuation	
	11. Meta-discourse	*Shall I start with mentioning the objects on the left?*

Compensatory strategies are used to address lexical problems in the messages communicated by either the speaker or the hearer. For example, a circumlocution can be used because the speaker does not know the required word ('a thing to make your nails more beautiful' [= file]), but it can also be used to explain a particular word that the hearer does not understand ('tweezers, you know, a thing to pull out hairs'). These are strategies that speakers use to compensate for their lexical deficiencies. Compensatory strategies can be subdivided into process-oriented strategies, which characterise a more conceptual approach towards solving communication problems and linguistic encoding strategies, which are based on simply replacing one lexical unit by another (Kellerman 1991). Examples of process-oriented strategies in which speakers try to solve their lexical problems at a more conceptual level are making generalisations ('under the big yellow fruit' [= melon]) and giving descriptions ('a thing you put on your hand when you're bleeding' [= band-aid]). Examples of linguistic encoding strategies are 'foreignizing'

('an photoapparat' [= camera]), code switching ('an teethbrush and pasta' [= tooth paste]) and word coinage ('cumcumber' [= cucumber]).

Paralinguistic strategies, which are typical of CMC, are aimed at consolidating the affective relationship between the interactants (Smith 2003). In CMC interactions, participants make use of expressive typography, such as capitals, emoticons or exclamation marks to signal their emotions. They also use so-called 'onomatopoeia', such as 'Ow!' or 'Ahhh' to that effect.

Finally, meta-discursive strategies are also labelled because these strategies are aimed at collaborating while solving the task such as 'Shall I list all the objects in the picture?' or 'Shall we start top left?'

We expect that if both speakers are non-native users (such as in ELF communication), their resort to communication strategies will be different than when an 'expert' speaker (i.e. the native speaker) can assist the less competent ('novice') speaker in solving communicative problems (such as in L1–L2 interactions).

In summary, we formulated two research questions:

(1) Do ELF interactions and L1–L2 interactions differ with regard to effectiveness?
(2) Do ELF interactions and L1–L2 interactions differ with regard to the use of communication strategies?

Method

The study used an experimental within-subject design, in which Dutch–German dyads used three different languages (Dutch, German and English) to collaborate on three spot-the-differences tasks in three consecutive chat sessions. A within-subject design was preferable to a between-subject design as it allowed us to test each participant on all communication modes. Since the same individuals participated in the three experimental conditions (i.e. communication mode) and variation among individual participants (e.g. degree of verbosity) was held constant, possible significant findings can be attributed more reliably to experimental conditions than to idiosyncratic behaviour of individual participants.

Participants

A total of 30 Dutch students (nine male and 21 female) and 30 German students (14 male and 15 female; one participant failed to fill in sex) took part in a within-subject experiment. All participants were first-year students at the Radboud University Nijmegen, enrolled in a variety of programmes ranging from business communication to psychology. Participants had a mean age of 21.5 years (SD = 2.14; range = 18–30). All participants were undergraduate students and were native speakers of Dutch or German. Participants were asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire asking them to self-assess their proficiency using rating scales (e.g. 'I think communicating in English [/Dutch/German] is easy-difficult') and indicate residency in the target community for English and for the mother tongue of their interlocutor (Dutch or German). The Dutch participants indicated they felt significantly more insecure about communicating in the native language of their partner than the German participants ($t(40) = 6.01$, $p < .001$). The Dutch also considered communication in the native language of their partner to be significantly more difficult ($t(40) = 8.34$, $p < .001$) and used it less frequently than the German participants ($t(40) = 6.15$, $p < .001$). This was not unexpected as the experiment took place in The Netherlands

and the German participants all studied at a Dutch university. There were no significant differences between Dutch and German participants with regard to their self-assessed proficiency or target-community residency for English. Half of the participants were also asked to take a validated online proficiency test in English, Dutch and German. This test did not reveal any significant differences in proficiency in English. As the experiment was rather long, we decided not to administer the proficiency test for the remaining participants (Ross 1998).

Materials and procedure

We constructed three different 'spot-the-differences' tasks. For each task, we manipulated two versions of a picture, containing a varied set of objects, the names of which we predicted participants would be unfamiliar with, such as various toiletry items: tweezers, cotton buds or panty liners (see Figure 1). The objective of this manipulation was to elicit negotiation of meaning among participants, as they try to find the differences between the two versions of the picture.

Our respondents carried out three tasks, which resulted in 90 chats, two of which were not logged due to technical problems. A total of 88 chats were analysed. The three tasks were comparable in difficulty. For each task, participants were given two different versions of a picture with a number of objects. Each participant collaborated with a partner via the computer to find 10 differences between the pictures, within a time limit of 15 minutes. At the start of the experiment, participants received instructions in their native language. After each chat session, participants completed a short judgement questionnaire in which they evaluated their attitudes and experiences. Before each chat session, participants were instructed to complete the task in the target language (German, Dutch or English). The order of the three tasks and language of interaction were varied systematically per dyad.

The tasks were performed via online chat. Online chat is characterised by direct interaction between two or more speakers. It is similar to a face-to-face interaction because all participants in the chat continually take turns to relay their messages, and unlike in other writing tasks (e.g. diary letter or essay writing) are not given much time to review their written message (Iwasaki and Oliver 2003, 63).

Figure 1. Travelkit parts 1 and 2.

Instrumentation and data analysis

Effectiveness was measured as number of differences found in the 'spot-the-differences' task and in terms of the total number of words used in the chat. After participants completed their tasks, chat logs were collected and the data were analysed for the number of differences found by participants, the number of words and the occurrence of communication strategies. We used analysis of variance (one-way ANOVAs) to examine differences in number of differences found and number of words used between communication modes. To examine differences between communication modes in more detail we used post hoc Bonferroni comparisons. Finally, for the analysis of the use communication strategies we used non-parametric chi-square analyses, which enabled us to examine the distribution of strategies across the different modes.

Results

The main purpose of the present study was to investigate the effectiveness of mode of communication and, more specifically, the effectiveness of communication in a lingua franca (i.e. ELF) versus communication in the native language of one of the interlocutors (i.e. L1–L2).

Effectiveness

In addressing the first research question, i.e. the number of differences found, the unit of analysis was the interaction itself, since conversational partners solved the task in dyads and were jointly responsible for the number of differences found. If we look at the effectiveness of ELF versus L1–L2, it turns out that significantly more differences were found in the L1–L2 chats where one of the partners chatted in their mother tongue (M = 4.24, SD = 2.29) than in the chats where both partners chatted in ELF (M = 3.42, SD = 2.24; $t(174)$=2.29, $p < .026$). The chat sessions resulted in participants spotting around four differences in their pictures on average (out of a possible 10).

With regard to number of differences found in the pictures as a measure of effectiveness, it can be concluded that L1–L2 interactions were more effective than ELF interactions. The results also show that participants were more effective in Dutch than in German, which is probably due to the fact that the German participants considered communication in the L1 of their partner less difficult than the Dutch participants.

With regard to number of words as a measure of effectiveness, we used the participants as the unit of analysis. This means that for all speakers we analysed the number of words they used when chatting in their mother tongue (L1: Dutch or German), ELF or L2 (Dutch or German). A one-way ANOVA with language of interaction as factor and number of words per chat as dependent variable revealed a main effect for language of interaction in the dyad ($F(2, 173) = 9.50$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .10$). A post hoc comparison (Bonferroni) showed that mother tongue speakers (M = 280, SD = 119.6) used significantly more words than L2 speakers (M = 197.98, SD = 88.96; $p < .001$). The difference between L2 speakers and ELF speakers (M = 239.43, SD = 95.36) was not significant.

Communication strategies

Our second research question concerned the number and type of communication strategies that chat partners used to find the differences in the pictures. As becomes

clear from Figure 2, chat partners made frequent use of both compensatory strategies and paralinguistic strategies, in particular, in all three languages. The other strategies were used considerably less often. In the analysis presented below, the focus will be on analysing those strategies for which significant differences were found among the three modes (L1, L2 and ELF).

In an overall analysis, a chi-square analysis for strategy and language type ($\chi^2(22, n = 2061) = 154.12$, $p < .001$; Cramer's $V = .19$) revealed that variations in use of strategies could mainly be attributed to variations in mode of communication for seven of the strategies: *appealing for assistance*, *signalling linguistic deficiency*, *signalling insecurity*, *offering assistance*, *compensatory strategies, paralinguistic strategies* and *meta-discourse* (Table 2).

First of all, it is perhaps not surprising that interlocutors more frequently appeal for assistance in their L2 and offer assistance in their L1.

Other differences in frequency distribution concerned strategies that interlocutors can use to indicate they may lack the linguistic competence required in the foreign language: signalling insecurity and signalling linguistic deficiency. Interlocutors can hesitate or apologise for their inadequate proficiency in the target language, as in Example (1) (typos and other mistakes are reproduced as they occurred in the chats):

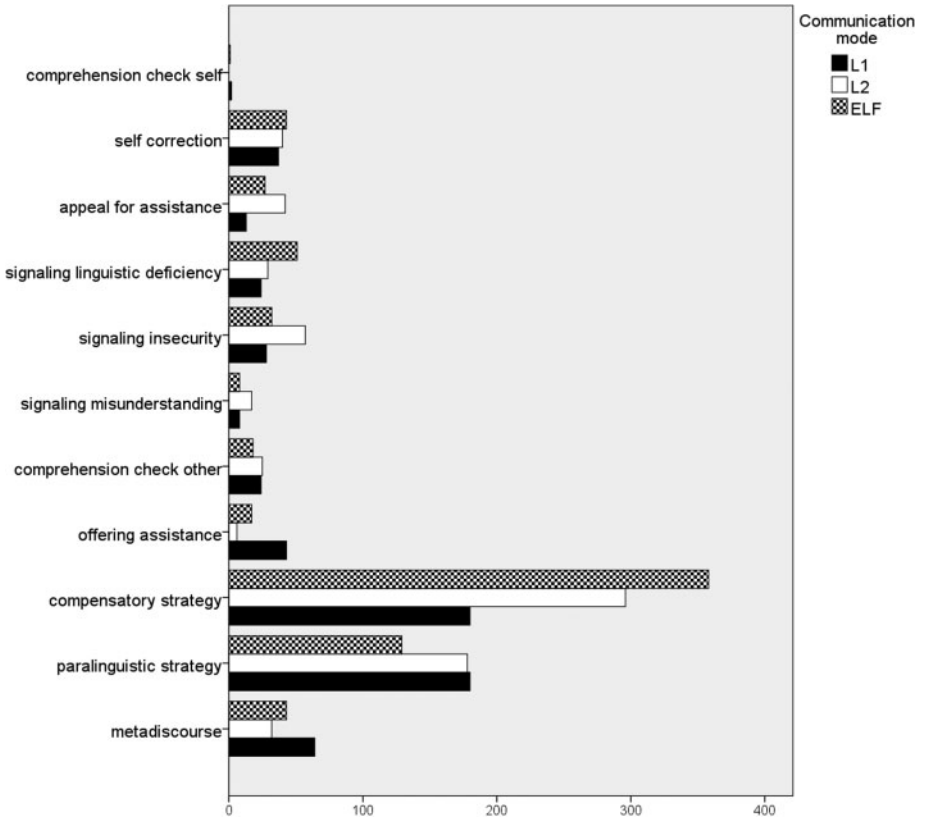

Figure 2. Total of strategies in L1, L2 and ELF.

Table 2. Frequency of distribution of communication strategies for all language types (% per mode of communication in brackets).

	L1	L2	ELF
1. Comprehension check (self)	2 (66.7%)	0 (0%)	1 (33.3%)
2. Self-correction	37 (30.8%)	40 (33.3%)	43 (35.8%)
3. Appealing for assistance	13 (15.9%)*	42 (51.2%)*	27 (32.9%)
4. Signalling linguistic deficiency	24 (23.1%)	29 (27.9%)	51 (49.0%)*
5. Signalling insecurity	28 (23.9%)	57 (48.7%)*	32 (27.4%)
6. Signalling misunderstanding	8 (24.2%)	17 (51.5%)	8 (24.2%)
7. Comprehension check (other)	24 (35.8%)	25 (37.3%)	18 (26.9%)
8. Offering assistance	43 (65.2%)*	6 (9.1%)*	17 (25.8%)
9. Compensatory strategies	180 (21.6%)*	296 (35.5%)	358 (42.9%)*
10. Paralinguistic strategies	180 (37.0%)*	178 (36.6%)	129 (26.5%)*
11. Meta-discourse	64 (46%)*	32 (23%)	43 (30.9%)

*Indicates an adjusted residual >|2.58|, corresponding to a 99% confidence interval.

(1) *NL6 types:* *meine deutsch is sehr slechts, sorry!*
'mine german is very bads, sorry!'

Signalling insecurity occurred most frequently when interlocutors communicated in their L2. A related strategy is signalling linguistic deficiency, where speakers indicate that they do not know a particular linguistic expression, such as in Example (2):

(2) *GE3 types:* *right form the sponge there is some white fluffy thing (don't know the word)*

In this example, the German speaker indicates that he lacks the term for the object he is trying to describe and uses a (functional) description of the object. Signalling linguistic deficiency typically occurred in ELF chats.

Further, interlocutors more frequently offered assistance in their L1 than in their L2. A more detailed analysis of the strategy offering assistance showed that instead of explicitly offering help, interlocutors predominantly used all kinds of implicit strategies to anticipate comprehension problems on the part of the interlocutor and would offer help in the form of, for example, an explanation of a difficult word. An example of this strategy is Example (3), where the German speaker seems to anticipate that the Dutch interlocutor may not understand the word 'peaches':

(3) *GE10 types:* *on the right*
are there also some peaches?
orange fruits?
NL10 types: *yes*
GE10 types: *okay*
NL10 types: *no difference there*

Another difference in frequency distribution concerned the category of paralinguistic strategies, which were used less frequently in ELF than in the L1 or L2. The majority of paralinguistic strategies were onomatopoeia, such as in Example (4), or emoticons, as in Example (5):

(4) *NL5 types:* *woohoo*
(5) *GE9 types:* *another difference,* ☺

Meta-discourse is another strategy that was distributed unevenly across the three language types. L1 speakers used the strategy more often than L2 or ELF speakers. In Example (6), we see that the Dutch speaker suggests taking the initiative by describing the objects in the picture:

(6) *NL5 types:* *hmm, zal ik anders bescrhijven wat op mijn foto is*
'hmm, shall I just mnetion what is in my photo'

Of the seven categories for which we found significant differences, compensatory strategies accounted for most variation. In view of the large number of strategies found, we carried out a more detailed analysis. We distinguished five subcategories of compensatory strategies, all of which were used differently across the three language types (Table 3). A chi-square analysis for compensatory strategies and mode of communication ($\chi^2(8, n = 834) = 190.35$, $p < .001$; Cramer's $V = .34$) was significant. An analysis of standardised adjusted residuals showed that differences in frequency distribution were significant for all subcategories of compensatory strategies.

Compensatory strategies, as was discussed above, are typically used when speakers lack the linguistic means for communicating their intended meanings. The most frequently used compensatory strategies were the process-oriented strategies: the use of circumlocutions and generalisations. Of these two process-oriented strategies, both generalisations and circumlocutions were used relatively less frequently by L2 speakers. Generalisations were used relatively more frequently by ELF speakers, whereas circumlocutions were used relatively more frequently by L1 speakers. A typical example of a circumlocution is Example (7), where a Dutch participant does not know the word for nail file in English and resorts to a functional description of the object. Note how the strategy description co-occurs with a literal translation from Dutch ('pincet' for tweezers = Pinzette in German) and is followed in the next turn by the strategy signalling linguistic deficiency ('don't know the exact english word'):

(7) *NL3 types:* *i have 1 pincet and 2 things you use for nail polishing for the shape*
don't know the exact english word
GE3 types: I have 2 pincets
NL3 types: okay
and 1 nail polish thing?
GE3 types: yes

The compensatory strategy of giving descriptions was by no means reserved for non-native speakers who did not know the word for an object in a foreign language. It is also a

Table 3. Frequency of distribution of compensatory strategies for all language types (% per language type in brackets).

	L1	L2	ELF
Compensatory strategies			
Generalisation	56 (31.1%)	51 (17.2%)*	115 (32.1%)*
Circumlocution	111 (61.7%)*	60 (20.3%)*	157 (43.9%)*
Word coinage	3 (1.7%)*	49 (16.6%)*	30 (8.4%)
Foreignising	0 (0%)*	30 (10.1%)*	9 (2.5%)*
Code switching	10 (5.6%)*	106 (35.8%)*	47 (13.1%)*

*Indicates an adjusted residual >|2.58|, corresponding to a 99% confidence interval.

strategy that was frequently used by native speakers to explain a word that their non-native chat partner was not familiar with, as in Example (8). In this example, the Dutch participant is not familiar with the German word for sponge (*Schwamm*) and is helped out by the German participant's functional description of a sponge:

(8)	*NL9 types:*	*was ist ein schwamm?* *ist das fur diene hare?* **deine* 'what is a sponge?' 'is it for yuor hair?' 'your'
	GE9 types:	*damit kann man sich waschen nee nicht fuer haare sondern fuer den koerper* 'with it you can wash yourself no not for hair but' 'for the body'

The other process-oriented compensatory strategy was the use of generalisations, where a speaker uses a more general term for objects for which they lack the appropriate lexical term. A particularly common strategy used by ELF speakers was to use the word 'thing' or 'thingie' to describe objects for anything for which they lacked the English term, as in Example (9), where NL10 uses the word 'thingies' for strawberries:

(9)	*NL10 types:*	*and next to that there are 4 little red round thingies*

Overall, linguistic encoding compensatory strategies, word coinage, foreignising and code switching, occurred less frequently than process oriented strategies in the chats. Linguistic encoding strategies were used relatively more frequently by L2 speakers than by L1 or ELF speakers. Example (10) is an example of a foreignising strategy. The speaker gives a literal translation of the German word 'Pflaume' into Dutch 'pluim' (= feather), where the intended word is Dutch 'pruim' (= plum):

(10)	*GE2 types:*	*en dan een pluim of zo* and then a feather, or something like that
	NL3 types:	*haha, jaa een pruim, bedoel je?* *heb ik ook* Haha, yes, a plum you mean? I have it too
	GE2 types:	*haha ja*

Conclusion and discussion

Our first research question concerned the effectiveness of communication mode. In terms of achievement of communicative goals, interlocutors found more differences in L1–L2 interactions. It appears that, everything else being equal, interlocutors are more effective in L1–L2 interactions than in ELF interactions. This is in line with our expectations on the basis of House (1999), who also found ELF interactions to be less effective in solving difficult referential tasks than interactions in which one of the interlocutors could rely on the proficiency of a mother tongue speaker. The outcome of our study is also in line with the findings reported in Van Engen et al. (2010), who found that mixed native/non-native pairs of participants were more efficient than non-native pairs with different native tongues in accomplishing a spot-the-differences task in English. Van Engen et al. also found that in ELF interactions, non-native participants with different native languages were least effective.

In order to benefit from this L1–L2 advantage, the L2 speakers in these interactions should at least have a working knowledge of the target language. The outcome of the Eurobarometer (2012) has shown that many Europeans master more than two foreign languages and that English remains the most widely spoken foreign language throughout Europe. More specifically, 38% of EU citizens claim that they have sufficient skills in English to have a conversation, whereas 20% of Europeans indicate that they know either French or German along with their mother tongue. Our study has shown that between closely related languages, L1–L2 communication could be beneficially utilised, in particular in a European Union context, where multilingualism and language diversity is advocated as an asset in international communication.

With regard to verbosity, we found that L1 speakers used more words than L2 speakers. This is somewhat contrary to expectation because one would expect effective language users to be parsimonious in view of the limited time span. Therefore, one would expect L1 speakers to be less verbose in order to be most effective. One plausible explanation could be that L1 speakers felt the need to provide linguistic support to the L2 users. We conclude that for this type of task, verbosity may not be a valid measure for effectiveness. In future research, we propose to include L1–L1 interactions to verify whether L1 speakers are more parsimonious in interactions with other L1 speakers than in interactions with L2 speakers.

Our second research question concerned the type of communication strategy used as a function of language choice (ELF or L1–L2). We found that communication mode seems to make a difference for *appealing for assistance*, *signalling linguistic deficiency*, *signalling insecurity*, *offering assistance*, *compensatory strategies*, *paralinguistic strategies* and *meta-discourse*. It is not surprising that L1 speakers make relatively more use of the strategy 'offering assistance' since they are in a better position to offer help than the other two groups of speakers. The same is true for 'appealing for help', which was relatively more often used by L2 speakers: in view of their (relatively) more limited proficiency, they can be expected to ask for help more frequently.

The finding that appeals for assistance and offers of assistance occurred more frequently in L1–L2 interactions suggests that scaffolding did indeed occur in that the non-native ('novice') speakers seemed to lean on the 'expert' native speakers in solving their referential problems. In the ELF interactions, where native linguistic expertise was not available, interlocutors more often had to resort to different tactics to negotiate understanding.

A noteworthy finding is the fact that there is a difference between ELF speakers on the one hand and L1 and L2 speakers on the other hand with regard to the strategy 'signalling linguistic deficiency'. Users of ELF signalled linguistic deficiency more often than non-native language users. It might be the case that in the L1–L2 interactions, our L2 speakers, who had the advantage of having a native speaker to assist them, no longer experienced the need to signal their linguistic shortcomings. Conversely, in ELF interactions, the necessity to signal linguistic deficiencies may be more urgent as both interactants realise they are conversing with a non-native user of the language and, thus, cannot rely on the other person's linguistic expertise.

With regard to paralinguistic strategies, we found that ELF speakers used paralinguistic strategies relatively less often than L1 speakers. Since paralinguistic strategies can be regarded as markers of affection, it might be the case that L1 speakers more than ELF speakers feel the need to encourage their partners with the help of these expressive CMC means (Walther and D'Addario 2001).

We also noticed that L1 speakers more often used meta-discourse than ELF speakers or L2 speakers (cf. Nakatani 2006). This can be easily explained by the fact that L1 speakers, because of their proficiency, more often take the initiative and comment on the process of solving the puzzle.

Of all strategies, compensatory strategies were used most often by our participants. This may, of course, be a resultant of the task used because these were constructed to prompt negotiation about unknown lexical items. In ELF interactions, process-oriented compensatory strategies occurred more frequently than in L1–L2 interactions, whereas linguistic-encoding compensatory strategies occurred more frequently in L1–L2 interactions than in ELF interactions. A tentative explanation for this finding may be that process-oriented strategies require a higher level of proficiency, and that our participants were more proficient in English than in either Dutch or German. Another possible explanation is that our participants relied on the linguistic competences of their partners when chatting in L1–L2 interactions, so that they used linguistic encoding strategies more often, because they knew the mother tongue speakers would be capable of decoding their strategies, since both languages share linguistic proximity. Future research should focus on examining the relationship between proficiency and compensatory strategies in more detail for a variety of foreign languages.

We already noted the occurrence of scaffolding in relation to use of the strategies appealing for and asking for assistance. In addition, there are indications that scaffolding not only occurs at a lexical level, but also at a meta-discursive, task level. Thus, a possible explanation for the higher effectiveness of L1–L2 interactions may lie in the way speakers in these interactions managed tasks in the chats. In many of the L1–L2 interactions in our corpus, explicit and implicit task management seemed to occur more often than in ELF. In L1–L2 chats, the L2 interlocutors would more readily leave the initiative for describing the pictures in the task with the native speaker as is demonstrated in Example (11), where the non-native speaker explicitly asks the native speaker to take the lead:

(11) *NL3 types:* *mein deutsch ist nicht gut …*
'my German in not very good'
viellicht kansst du mir sagen was du siehst
'perhaps you can tell me what you see'
weil ich have keine ahnung
'because I have no clue'

In numerous other cases, the native speaker takes the initiative and proposes to list all the objects he or she sees in the picture, such that the interlocutor only has to agree or disagree, as is shown in Example (12):

(12) *NL1 types:* *zal ik van linksboven opnoemen wat ik allemaal zie?*
'shall I start from the upper left and mention what I see?'

In many other instances, the initiator role in the task is implicitly attributed, when the native speaker simply starts mentioning the objects in the picture, and the non-native speaker only has to agree or disagree. In our coding scheme, this type of task management was not included but it appears that initiative management might play an important role in enhancing the effectiveness of communication. The effect of initiative management would need to be addressed in future research.

Limitations and further research

Findings from the present study are limited in that we only investigated the effectiveness of the use of ELF versus L1–L2 in a Dutch/German setting. Gooskens (2007) already demonstrated the correlation between mutual intelligibility and linguistic distance, especially phonetic distance. It would be interesting to investigate whether results of the present study can be replicated in future studies with other languages that are similarly linguistically related, such as Danish and German, combinations of Scandinavian languages (e.g. Swedish / Norwegian), or Spanish and Portuguese, but also with more distantly linguistically related languages, such as, for example, French/Spanish versus Dutch/German. In addition, since in the present study proficiency levels in L2 were quite high, future research should also look at language pairs where the level of proficiency in the L2 under investigation can be expected to be lower than in ELF, such as Dutch (/German) – French (/Spanish) settings.

A third line of further research would be to look at the effectiveness of ELF versus receptive multilingualism, a mode of communication where both interactants use their mother tongue and have a receptive understanding of the partner's first language. Especially in European countries, where many citizens have (at least) a passive understanding of more than one foreign language (Eurobarometer 2012), ethnographic studies have shown that receptive multilingualism might be a promising and viable alternative to ELF or to communication in the partner's native tongue (Dresemann 2007; Ribbert and ten Thije 2007; Zeevaert 2007). However, there is a need for experimental studies, such as e.g. Bahtina 2013, to corroborate these findings that receptive multilingualism is indeed a plausible alternative.

Our investigation of the effectiveness of language choice in intercultural settings was limited to an experimental setting with a student population carrying out one type of referential problem-solving task, which makes it difficult to generalise findings. If we are to shed light on the effect of language choice in organisational settings, the next step in this line of research will be to undertake similar investigations in more ecologically valid settings, such as multinational/multicultural organisations.

With regard to implementing a language policy in MNCs, our findings suggest that alternative modes of communication, such as L1–L2 interactions, may indeed be more effective, especially in one-on-one interactions between speakers of typologically related languages such as Dutch and German. This implies that MNCs should consider facilitating or condoning multilingual practices, in addition to implementing a corporate language such as ELF. Not in the least because a policy of multilingualism alone would be too expensive and goes against the wish to control and to coordinate information flows within the company. Other studies have found that in many MNCs multilingualism exists in combination with ELF as the official corporate language in that for the international workforce negotiating language practices is a daily routine (Angouri and Miglbauer 2014).

In our study the differences between the two communication modes were most salient with regard to the use of compensatory strategies. L1–L2 interactions were characterised by a more frequent use of linguistic encoding strategies, which allow users to achieve lexical precision and detail. For example, a Dutch speaker of German code switching to the French 'fraises' for the German 'Erdbeere' in interaction with a German native speaker achieves a higher level of lexical precision than an ELF speaker using a code-oriented strategy such as 'a red fruit'. A tentative conclusion for organisations may be that the practice of multilingualism, which allows speakers to use other languages than

the corporate language, or indeed allows speakers to use ELF as one of the many alternative communication modes in a multilingual organisation, may be a better solution than reliance on a single corporate language (see also Angouri and Miglbauer 2014; Gunnarsson 2014; Lønsmann 2014).

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Note

1. Arguably, scaffolding can also occur between two ELF users with different levels of proficiency in that the less advanced ELF user is likely to benefit from the enhanced proficiency of the more advanced user.

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