

MISCOMMUNICATION AND ACCOMMODATION ISSUES IN ELF-MEDIATED INTERCULTURAL MIGRATION CONTEXTS

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Abstract - This paper focuses on interactions between West-African immigrants and Italian intercultural mediators in authority in centres for legal advice and medical assistance. In such contexts, it was observed that misunderstanding is often triggered by distinct ELF variations in contact. These variations are often, in Kachru's (1986) terms, from the *outer circle* (endonormative variations spoken by immigrants from former British colonies) and the *expanding circle* (exonormative variations making reference to native *inner-circle* norms spoken by non-native experts, who regard migrants' variations as 'defective variants' of the native-speaker language). Central in this enquiry is the notion of *transfer* of non-native speakers' respective L1 semantic, syntactic and pragmatic structures into ELF, caused by different cognitive-experiential backgrounds – or *schemata* (Carrell 1983) – underlying their native typologically different languages (Guido 2008, 2012, 2019) and their cultures (Jenkins 2007). Being aware of such L1-transfer processes underlying ELF uses is crucial for experts responsible for successful communication. Yet, as case studies will show, this is not evident in migration contexts where experts impose upon immigrants their own ELF-mediated specialized uses which may be cognitively inaccessible and conceptually unavailable (Widdowson 1991) to immigrants, thus representing the very cause of intercultural miscommunication in need of accommodation.

Keywords: English as a Lingua Franca (ELF); ELF-mediated migration contexts; L1→L2 transfer; ELF-induced +miscommunication processes; ELF-mediated accommodation strategies.

1. Introduction: ELF-induced issues in migration contexts

This paper enquires into the cognitive and communicative processes activated in the production and reception of ELF-mediated discourse taking place within domain-specific contexts when non-native speakers of English – namely, EU experts in authority (in the cases in point, intercultural mediators) and non-EU supplicants (in the case studies under analysis, migrants from Sub-Saharan West-Africa) – engage in interaction in specialized centres for legal and medical assistance. These are indeed the kind of contexts in which interviews carried out by EU experts frequently turn into gate-keeping situations for non-EU migrants due to the speakers' different variations of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in contact causing misunderstanding. It has been observed (Guido 2008, 2012, 2019) that, although both groups make use of English as their means of communication, the English variations each uses in these migration contexts are often respectively – to use Kachru's (1986) terminology – from the *outer circle* (regarding the variations spoken by migrants mainly coming from former British colonies) and from the *expanding circle* (variations spoken by EU experts who are non-native speakers of English). This means that, the outer-circle varieties are recognized as being norm-providing precisely as the *inner circle* endonormative ones spoken by native speakers. This is so because outer-circle speakers have developed their own norms that diverge from the inner-circle Standard-English ones and, at the same time, characterize their own 'different' Englishes as legitimate and accepted varieties become 'official' in post-colonial contexts. Expanding-circle English variations, instead, are typically exonormative as they tend to recognize and accept only

the inner-circle standard norms. What has been observed to happen in migration domains (Guido 2008) is that when migrants' outer-circle varieties are dislocated in an EU context and come into contact with exonormative expanding-circle variations, they lose their endonormative status as they come to be perceived by EU experts in charge of interactions on exactly the same level as other expanding-circle ELF variations – that is, as mere 'defective' variants of the inner-circle standard norms.

As a result, not recognizing different non-native variants of English may cause critical consequences, especially if cross-cultural interactions take place in migration contexts. This is so because, whereas in 'normal' circumstances of intercultural interactions ELF-users from the expanding circle aim at cooperative communication by drawing on the resources of their respective native languages without claiming any ownership of the English language (Jenkins 2007; Seidlhofer 2011), in cases of unequal encounters in migration contexts, instead, the conditions for achieving such mutual accommodation of communicative modes very often do not occur. The reason for such a cooperation failure is, therefore, to be ascribed not simply to status-differences between the participants in the interactions, but also, and crucially, to their respective different native linguacultural backgrounds, as well as to the outer-circle migrants' attempts at investing their socio-cultural identity in their ELF variants as an expression of their primary community values (Guido 2008).

Central in this enquiry into ELF variations used in migration contexts is the notion of *transfer* of the non-native speakers' respective native-language (L1) semantic, syntactic and pragmatic structures into ELF – a transfer that has been observed as mainly caused by the different cognitive-experiential backgrounds – or *schemata*¹ – underlying their native languages and cultures (Guido 2008, 2012, 2019). Whereas in mainstream interlanguage research (Selinker 1992; Selinker, Lakshmanan 1992) the notion of 'L1→L2 transfer' has principally explained the 'syntactic errors' produced by non-native speakers of a language (Corder 1981), in the present enquiry into migration interactions, it has been expanded to include the cognitive dimension of the participants' native schemata informing their L1 and, thus, influencing their use of ELF, thus causing misunderstandings. This schematic dimension of transfer is believed to affect the very processes of grammaticalization of ELF variations as it is activated by the L1 cognitive-syntactic structures interfering with the L2-grammar, thus prompting the development an ELF variation. By 'developing ELF grammar', though, is not to be intended as the process of a gradual approximation of non-native English variations to the native-speaker Standard English.

More specifically, when ELF variations from the outer and the expanding circles come into contact in migration contexts, EU experts in charge of interactions should not regard the non-EU migrants' characteristic semantic, syntactic and pragmatic deviations from native-speaker Standard English as 'interlanguage errors' that need to be corrected by activating a defossilization process (Selinker 1992), or rather as 'code deviations' that reveal 'uneducated' non-native speakers. In fact, such deviations from native-speaker Standard English are nothing but 'English variations' representing variable, grammaticalized features of ELF variations that are independent from the native-speaker code and, as such, in need to be acknowledged and accepted. Yet, what EU experts from the expanding circle usually expect from non-EU outer-circle migrants is a conformity to

¹ By *schemata* is here meant the background knowledge of culturally-determined linguistic and social behaviours stored in the minds of the members of a specific speech community (Carrell 1983) and thus informing not only their native 'social-semiotic' cognitive frames (Halliday 1978), but also the actualization of such frames into the grammar structures of their L1.

the exonormative native-speaker code regularly assessed and certified in EU pedagogic contexts.

On such grounds, misunderstanding in ELF use has been noted to be less frequent when the two participants' native languages are typologically similar (Greenberg 1973) in their cognitive-semantic and syntactic structures (Guido 2008). These structures, once transferred to the participants' use of ELF, are not expected to cause serious divergences because their respective ELF variations may converge syntactically and be cognitively shared in the interaction, as they may be perceived by both participants as familiar and 'unmarked' (Eckman 1977). Conversely, when an ELF variation is perceived as 'marked' (*ibidem*), the cause is normally to be ascribed to the participants' typologically-different L1 features transferred into their respective ELF variations, which are assumed to trigger misunderstanding. Hence, EU experts in charge of interactions with non-EU migrants should be aware of such processes of L1-transfer underlying ELF-use in order to avoid communication failure which, instead, frequently occurs in such intercultural contexts – as the following case studies will illustrate.

2. Case-study analysis

2.1. Case-study method

In the enquiry reported with reference to the case studies that will follow, the collection of data on the ELF variations used by the participants in interactions occurred during the implementation of longitudinal case studies taking place in Italian reception camps hosting non-EU immigrants and asylum seekers. The 'protocol procedure' employed for data analysis (Ericsson, Simon 1984) was aimed at investigating the processes by which experts (mostly Italian specialists) try to impose – deliberately or unintentionally – upon immigrants their own ELF pragmalinguistic uses and the generic conventions informed by their specialized background shared with the community of practice to which they belong. Such uses and conventions may be not only cognitively and linguistically inaccessible, but also conceptually unavailable (Widdowson 1991) to non-EU immigrants who, in fact, may find it difficult, if not impossible, to understand specialized concepts and discourse behaviours that are alien to their native socio-cultural and pragmalinguistic schemata. The hypothesis underlying data analysis was that participants in such interactions unconsciously activate their own respective native linguacultural schemata so as to make sense of the unfamiliar experiences that emerge in such contexts of intercultural communication. Indeed, it is precisely this activation of native linguacultural schemata in both interacting parts that is assumed to be the very cause of miscommunication in migration contexts, as the following case studies will illustrate by presenting instances of ELF-induced communication failure, as well as of the activation of processes by means of which possible accommodation strategies can be put into practice.

2.2. Case Study 1

Case Study 1 represents an instance of intercultural miscommunication triggered by a EU experts' and West-African immigrants' mutual absence of recognition of the L1→ELF transfer processes that both unconsciously activate as they interact by using their respective ELF variations. Central to this case study is the process of contact between two divergent semantic conceptualisations of events respectively reflected in two typologically divergent L1s spoken by the participants in an interaction. In the case study in point, the two interacting

participants were: an Italian intercultural mediator interrogating a Nigerian immigrant suspected of withholding the identities of the smugglers who had allowed him to reach the southern coasts of Italy. The ELF variations employed during the whole interaction were: the outer-circle endonormative Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) spoken by the immigrant, and the expanding-circle ELF variation spoken by the Italian intercultural mediator – this latter variation considered as exonormative in that it typically makes constant reference to both inner-circle norms of native-speaker usage, as well as to the ‘interrogation routines’ conventionally applied by the relevant EU communities of practice.

The case-study analysis in point specifically takes into account the participants’ respective typologically-different accusative and ergative L1 structures as they are automatically transferred into their own ELF variations. On one hand, there is the Nigerian immigrant’s ‘ergative’ construction of events typical of his L1 – i.e. Igbo (Agbo 2009; Nwachukwu 1976) – in which the logical inanimate object replaces an animate agent in grammatical-subject position according to the OV(S) typology (Langacker 1991, p. 336). It was observed that such ergative clausal construction was indeed transferred by the immigrant to his own NPE uses representing, in this displaced Italian context, an actual ELF variation that he employed to supposedly facilitate intercultural communication with the intercultural mediator. Therefore, in recounting his clandestine journey to Italy, the immigrant identified the causation of the illegal voyage through the Mediterranean sea not in a human agency (namely, ‘the smugglers’), but in an ‘inanimate object’ (namely, the ‘ship’), which was perceived not as a simple ‘medium’, but rather as an ‘animate subject’ endowed with autonomous life, purpose and force-dynamic energy. On the other hand, however, the Italian intercultural mediator automatically interpreted the Nigerian immigrant’s native ergative clausal structure that characterized his own ‘ELF variation’ according to his own L1 (Italian) ‘accusative’ SVO transitive clausal structure. This meant that the intercultural mediator actually misconstrued the real intentions of the immigrant’s narration, thus ascribing to the Nigerian immigrant the deliberate choice to omit information about the smugglers’ identity, on the grounds that he did not constructed the clauses in his narrative by conforming to his own native ‘accusative’ clausal structures which placed an animate agent in a transitive subject position. Indeed, this accusative structure typically characterizes the Western conventional register of institutional interrogations, that places an animate agent in a thematic subject position when they are assumed, or recognized, to be guilty of an offence.

The extract that follows is taken from the interrogation carried out by the Italian intercultural mediator (IM) to the Nigerian immigrant (NI) when was just landed on the Italian coasts. Such an interrogation was carried out in support of the police enquiry (Guido 2008)² and each participant used his own respective ELF variation:³

IM: who::: (.) assisted you::: (.) in the journey to Italy?

NI: won old ship bin bo::ard os many many < =di deck so::: so:: bin pack (.) di hold so so cra::m .hhh di ship wood bin sweat hh di hull bin (.) drip water [*An old ship boarded us, too many, the deck was so packed and the hold so cramped. The ship wood sweated, the hull leaked water.*]

IM: mm hm (..) how much money did you pay for that ship? who::: did [you pay?]

NI: [every money] (.) e::verything >bin don dry finish< (..) .hh after won day journey di ship bin struggle struggle against di se:::a (.) .hh-heavy won night (.) hhh di

² Conversation symbols: [] → overlapping speech; underlining → emphasis; ° ° → quieter speech; (.) → micropause; (..) → pause; :: → elongation of prior sound; hhh → breathing out; .hhh → breathing in; > < → speed-up talk; = → latching.

³ NPE cues are transcribed in conventional orthography and reported in their original syntactic structure.

wave dem bin de ri::se (.) like tower (.) na cold cold o o [Every money, every good had dried up. After one day journey, the ship struggled against the rough sea in the night. The waves were rising like towers and they were so cold!]

As it can be noted, IM starts the interrogation with a question constructed according to the expected accusative clausal structure, which typically foregrounds the animate agent who caused the action by putting him/them in a ‘culpable’ subject position (“Who”). This explains why IM takes NI’s answer as dispreferred, and this is so not only because of the presence of the typical NPE pre-verbal tense/aspect markers that IM perceives as ‘markedly deviating’ from the Standard-English syntactic code, but above all because NI’s answer does foreground the inanimate object of the “ship” collocated in subject position within the ergative clause construction, thus representing it as if it were the actual animate agent causing the action. In fact, the real force-dynamic agent (namely, the smuggler) is left unspecified according to the ergative typology characterizing NI’s native clausal structure. Furthermore, IM must have perceived NI’s answer as ‘marked’ and ‘deviating’ also pragmatically. For instance, a ‘pragmatic marker’ is the emphatic phoneme /o/, that is often reduplicated, representing an Igbo/Yoruba emotional suffix stressing, in this case, the feeling of anguish and despair evident in NI’s report. Another instance of ‘emotional intensifiers’ (Anagbogu 1995) is also represented by the word/morpheme reduplication that is a typical ‘substratum-loan structure’ transferred from Nigerian indigenous languages into NPE, as well as into other pidgin and creole variations) (i.e., “many many”, “so so”, giving emphasis to the crowd of immigrants on board, and “struggle struggle”, highlighting the ship’s desperate battle against the rough sea). Such emotional stress is also conveyed by the sequence of part-of-the-ship metonymic personifications collocated in subject position within a series of ergative clauses in which verbs normally labelled as ‘transitive’ in accusative languages are here used intransitively (the ship-deck that ‘packed’, the ‘hold’ that “so so” ‘crammed’ with people who disregarded the suffering of the “ship wood” that ‘sweated’ and of the hull that ‘dripped water’). The ‘ship’s dissection’ into its parts that suddenly appear as ‘independent animate subjects’ may be interpreted as an embodiment of the immigrant’s unsettling realization that there were really too many people overcrowding those weak and frail parts of the “old ship” carrying them. Yet, such a high emotional peak in NI’s narrative seemed to be completely ignored by IM who, instead, replied with another detached question aimed again at eliciting NI to reveal the smugglers’ identity (“who did you pay?”). But IM, once again, replies with another dispreferred series of ergative clausal structures where the inanimate object is placed in an animate subject position (NI’s money and goods had dried up, in antithesis with the overflowing waves against which the ship fiercely ‘struggled’). In this case, therefore, the two participants in the interaction evidently failed in achieving a communicative accommodation through ELF and, thus, miscommunication prevailed.

2.3. Case Study 2

Case Study 2 illustrates another situation of cross-cultural miscommunication – regarding this time the interaction between an Italian intercultural mediator and an asylum seeker from Sierra Leone – but, this time, alternative accommodation strategies are suggested (Guido 2012). More specifically, this case study is concerned with the transfer into the asylum seeker’s Sierra-Leone Krio English of the metaphorical structures typical of his native Yoruba language (Fabummi 1970) representing ‘mental processes of cognition, perception and affection’ in the concrete terms of ‘material processes of doing’ (Halliday 1994). Such transfer processes, normally construed in their intended meaning within the original Krio speech community, often come to be misunderstood in migration contexts

where Krio is assimilated to any other ELF variation. Nativized English variants, in fact, become ‘displaced’ and ‘transidiomatic’ (Silverstein 1998) once their patterns of meaning become disconnected from their original outer-circle contexts of use to be recontextualized within estranged expanding-circle communicative situations.

Furthermore, also the forensic methods of transcription of the immigrants’ ELF oral reports, usually made by intercultural mediators in support of the police or lawyers after institutional interviews, often involve first a displacement of such reports from their original contexts, and, then, their written reframing – or ‘entextualization’ (Urban 1996) – within totally new contexts. Indeed, the conventional Western entextualization practice of transcribing an oral report into a pattern of paragraphs follows culture-specific parameters of contextual logic, indexicality, textual coherence and cohesion, which do not correspond to the immigrants’ native discourse parameters that they transfer to their ELF reports (Blommaert 1997). Such a discrepancy may give rise to the serious issue of forensic misconstructions. Hence the importance of recovering the ‘situatedness’ (Gumperz 1982) of the immigrants’ displaced narrative (which entails recognizing the original contextual reference and relevance of their ELF reports) so as to interpret their narratives pertinently and, thus, producing appropriate forensic reformulations.

A suggestion for a reliable entextualization that can be truthful to the intended meanings of the immigrants’ original reports is represented by Hymes’ (2003) ‘ethnopoetic approach’ to the analysis and transcription of non-Western oral narratives revealing non-conventional ‘verse patterns’ of language coherence, highlighting that which the speakers themselves consider as relevant in their accounts. In this case study in point, the ethnopoetic analysis has proven effective in suggesting the correct interpretation of the asylum seeker’s Krio ‘material processes’ as a metaphorical representation of his states of mind, whereas the Italian intercultural mediator’s conventional forensic entextualization of the same report into paragraphs shows evidence of his misinterpretation, that is principally due to his own biased context misconception producing communication failure. This being so because the intercultural mediator actually misinterpreted as an expression of physical abuse the asylum seeker’s native ‘material metaphors’ for psychological abuse that the asylum seeker himself automatically transferred from his L1 Yoruba to the Krio-English variety that he employed as his ELF variation during the intercultural exchange he was involved in. Hence, the mediator’s presuppositions were misleading because they met neither truth conditions (as the events that asylum seeker reported were not actual material processes), nor felicity – or appropriateness – conditions (in that there was a lack of shared assumptions between the two participants in the encounter). Furthermore, this encounter was evidently unequal since the intercultural mediator in charge of the interaction instinctively attributed to himself the authority to ‘disambiguate’ the pragmatic presuppositions achieved in the asylum seeker’s report, without making any effort to try to comprehend the native pragmalinguistic and experiential schemata underlying his report.

The brief extract that follows is drawn from an interview carried out by an Italian intercultural mediator (IM) to a Krio-speaking asylum seeker (AS) from Sierra Leone who had fled from civil war but, in Italy, he was running the risk of repatriation should the Committee for Refugees’ Rights decide to reject his asylum application. The ethnopoetic entextualization shows how, by deleting IM’s questions, the organization of narrative into ‘ethnopoetic lines’ (Hymes 2003: 304) becomes possible, with each line representing a unit of meaning marked by a metaphorical expression, thus restating the original ‘situatedness’ of AS’s narration. The interview extract is given here in three versions:

- (1) the original protocol transcription of the interview reproducing the participants' respective ELF variations;⁴
- (2) IM's written entextualization of AS's report according to the conventional Western 'paragraph' format;
- (3) an 'ethnopoetic' entextualization of AS's report that is here proposed as a possible hybridization of different 'Western' and 'non-Western' narrative registers.

(1) *Original transcript*

IM: was everything oka::y with the Committee?

AS: o (.) dehn de chehr mi asylum application (.) yu si::? [*They are tearing my asylum application, you see?*]

IM: Pardon? (.) ehm (.) can you explain (.) [*>what do you mean?<*]

AS: [yehs] (.) dehn se:: mi kohntri na Nige::ria (.) a tehl dhen se a kohmoht na Salone.hhh boht dehn noh listin to mi [*Yes, they say my country is Nigeria. I tell them that I come from Sierra Leone, but they don't listen to me.*]

IM: they don't listen you?=
AS: =no

IM: so (.) now you should try to get a (.) humanitarian permi::t then (.) in this way your bosses could perhaps (.) regularize your work (.)

AS: o (.) dis boss ya so (.) dhen kin de kik mi ehvri de [*Oh, these bosses here keep kicking me every day!*]

IM: wha::t? they kick you?

AS: (.) dehn se a foh fala dehn, °boht dehn rod noh clear° [*They say that I must follow them but their road is not clear.*]

IM: do you say that they tell you to follow them? [where?]

AS: [hhh dehn] de lehf mi insai da::k da::k ples dehn [*Oh, they are leaving me inside a completely dark place.*]

(2) *IM's entextualization*

The Committee members have torn my asylum application to bits and when I tried to set out my reasons they didn't even listen to me. My bosses, too, are only keen to kick me every day! They tell me to follow them along an uneven road, and then they left me shut in a completely dark place.

(3) *'Ethnopoetic' entextualization*

The Committee members are criticizing my asylum application severely, *as if* they were tearing it.

They say that my country is Nigeria. I tell them that I come from Sierra Leone, but they don't listen to me.

The bosses I work for, moreover, keep disregarding me, and I feel *as if* they were kicking me every day!

They say that I should follow their argument, but the line, the 'path' of what they say is not clear.

They leave me entirely ignorant, *as if* in the dark, about everything.

IM introduces the contextual circumstances of place/participants (the Committee for Refugees' Rights) and AS replies by making anaphoric reference to the Committee members as "dehn" ('they') and by rendering their mental process of "severely criticizing" his asylum application into the material metaphor "de chehr" ('tearing'), and the consequent mental process of 'discarding an assumption' as 'tearing a piece of paper'

⁴ The Krio-ELF variation – in many ways similar to NPE (e.g., similar plural and pre-verbal markers) is here reproduced in its conventional orthography and syntax.

(Lakoff/Johnson 1999: 240). Yet, when IM asks for clarification, AS disambiguates the ‘material metaphor’ he has used by pointing out that the Committee’s offence was just psychological in that its components persisted in misidentifying him as a Nigerian, despite the fact that he kept on claiming that he fled from his ‘unsafe’ nation, Sierra Leone – this being a reference that escapes IM in that he fails to recognize the Krio term “Salone”. Then, as IM informs AS about legal possibilities that he, as an unregistered worker, could consider in order to enable his Italian employers to regularize his status, AS suddenly shifts his narrative focus from the Committee members to his Italian employers and to the mental, emotional effects that their behaviour has had on him. This is expressed by another ‘physical metaphor’ representing the employers (the “bosses”) who “kin de kik” (‘keep kicking’) – i.e., ‘keep offending, disregarding’ – him regularly, thus stressing the emotional reactions to their psychological/verbal disrespect towards him by resorting to the material metaphor of ‘violent tactile sensations’ (Sweetser 1990, p. 43). In his transcription (2), IM misapprehends such a metaphor by taking it literally and, in addition, by mistakenly rendering the Krio habitual/continuous-aspect markers “kin de” into the expression “keen to (on)” (“My bosses, too, are only keen to kick me every day!”) thus imputing to AS’s Italian employers the vicious practice of deliberate physical abuse. Furthermore, AS metaphorically represents the employers requiring him to share their line of reasoning, which he finds “not clear”, by metaphorically rendering abstract ‘reasoning’ as a material ‘journey through space’, and ‘understanding a line of thought’ as ‘following someone along a path’ (Lakoff, Johnson 1999, p. 236). Once again, IM misreads these material metaphors, misinterpreting them literally in terms of an obligation to carry out hard physical activities that AS’s Italian employers cruelly impose upon him. IM’s misinterpretation is indeed triggered by AS himself when he refers to the concrete image of a ‘road’ which IM, instead, does not immediately associate to the ‘mental metaphor’ of the ‘logical path to follow’. Moreover, IM arbitrarily renders the phrase ‘not clear’ into “uneven road”, probably due to his misreading as ‘not cleared’. Subsequently, AS blames his employers because, in his view, they keep him ignorant about his rights in Italy and, in order to express such psychological sense of displacement, AS uses the material metaphor ‘they are leaving me in completely dark places’ (i.e., ‘in the dark’), which is further underscored by the typical Krio lexical reduplication (“da:k da:k”). Once more, IM misconstrues this material metaphor by interpreting it literally as ‘dark place’ – a kind of ghastly cell in which AS is confined. Finally, in his entextualization, IM also inserts ‘backward links’ (“and when”, “and then”) to turn the paragraph into a ‘logical’ sequence of violent facts.

Differently from IM’s misconstruction, in the ethnopoetic entextualization of this interview proposed in (3), the choice of a hybrid ELF register is meant to disambiguate the material metaphors of the original report by means of similes, or of “as if” clauses, so as to make their mere mental implications explicit in order to avoid literal misinterpretations. Moreover, the two ‘logical subjects’ of the “Committee” and the “employers”, together with their respective contexts, are collocated in the position of the thematic starting point of each line, which allows the narrative to focus on ‘how these two logical subjects psychologically affect AS’ – which each time is followed by AS’s reaction of disappointment triggered by adversative contrajunction “but”. In sum, this ethnopoetic kind of forensic entextualization applied to non-Western migrants’ oral reports aims at complying with native narrative styles and pragmatolinguistic features that a conventional Western forensic transcription into paragraphs would probably obliterate.

2.4. Case Study 3

Similar entextualization issues noticed in forensic transcriptions of migrants' reports were also identified in the 'transcultural psychiatric' contexts of non-Western asylum seekers' ELF-mediated trauma reports which, once again, come to be conventionally transcribed according to established generic norms of Western tradition. This issue in intercultural interaction is illustrated in this Case Study 3, which introduces another instance of possible accommodation between different narrative modes, focusing this time on the ways in which the conventional specialized lexicon of the Western psychiatric discourse diverges considerably, in both its experiential and pragmatic terms, from the idiomatic expressions typical of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) used by non-Western migrants (Guido 2008, 2019). A case in point is represented by the observation that deontic and epistemic modalities pragmatically diverge from their expected uses in Western trauma narratives (Guido 2019). This case study, therefore, intends to enquire precisely into PTSD narratives reported by African refugees by means of their ELF variations. Such reports should be regarded as 'situated narratives' (Gumperz 1982) whose structures and idiomatic expressions acquire a pragmatic and experiential meaning only in reference to the native contexts of their use. Yet, when the Western specialists entextualize these non-Western narratives, they use the registers of Standard English referred to the lexical and discursive conventions established by the parameters of the *American Psychiatric Association* (APA) laid down in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (APA 2015). Such conventions in trauma narrative transcriptions directly refer, on the one hand, to typical clinical cases reporting the impact of traumatic experiences on Western victims of war and torture (usually US veterans of recent conflicts, mainly in the Middle East) and, on the other, to the scientific terminology typically referring to single-trauma effects where trauma is represented as a private, individual experience. Hence, such norms are inadequate for the assessment of multiple-trauma effects on African populations (Peltzer 1998) as they do not correspond to the way other non-Western cultures experience war trauma and communicate it verbally (Mattingly 1998). Linde (1993), for instance, claims that 'self' narratives are unknown in many cultures and, as Mattingly (1998) argues, non-Western trauma narratives are more about socio-political welfare than individual wellbeing, thus often requiring a therapeutic 'fictional coherence' involving entire affected communities in traumatic stories.

This case study is expressly meant to illustrate how such conventional norms transcription can be questioned by the choice of different 'situated narratives' whose 'deviating coherence', transferred to ELF, represents the reflection of different systems of knowledge, symbols and expectations that make reference to divergent ways of conceptualizing trauma experiences as they are culturally embedded within non-Western contexts of wars and torture. In such contexts, physical and psychological violence is usually experienced as a collective shock (often ascribed to political and even supernatural causes), rather than as a private abuse. This is reflected in the systematic disruption of the scientific-discourse conventions observed in the trauma narratives by West-African asylum seekers who use their own ELF variations into which they transfer their L1 narrative structures (Guido 2008, 2019). One of such instances is represented by the 'labels' that are conventionally used to define trauma disorders in Western Psychiatry which do not account for the typical 'mental imagery' employed by West-African refugees to make metaphorical sense of the traumatic events that they had to endure in situations of war. Such mental imagery informs the refugees' native 'idioms of distress' (Gibbs, O'Brien 1990) and trauma-narrative structures which are directly reflected in the ELF variations they use in narrating their experiences. This case study, hence, intends to propose a possible

alternative ELF-mediated hybrid register capable of accommodating different categorizations of trauma experience and which may be employed to officially report them in transcriptions during medical encounters taking place in immigration contexts.

The selected extracts are drawn from two corpora of, respectively, (a) scientific articles from the *Transcultural Psychiatry Journal (TPJ)* applying Western textual norms to the description of war-trauma effects on non-Western populations, and (b) transcribed protocols of trauma narratives by West-African immigrants (Guido 2008). A hybrid ELF register was then developed aimed at accommodating and textualizing divergent representations of the trauma experience.

In fact, in conventional Western PTSD registers, lexis is consistent with APA labels and, above all, it is non-negotiable. Furthermore, in such registers, the tone appears almost tentative also because of the recurrent use of epistemic modal verbs and hedges that seem to diminish the therapist's commitment to the interpretation of the non-Western asylum seekers' divergent ways of experiencing and narrating traumatic events, as it is illustrated in the following extract from a *TPJ* paper:

Very little is known about the consequences of trauma exposure in the survivors' lives. [...] After exposure to some traumatic event, one's initial response may include symptoms in the domains of physiology (e.g., rapid heart rate, body heat, sleep disturbance, appetite disturbance, nausea, shortness of breath, dizziness and palpitations, choking sensation, chest tightness, shaking, sweating, chills/hot flashes and numbness/tingling).

If, instead, non-Western ELF-mediated trauma narrative is accounted for, it can be noticed that idioms of distress considerably diverge from APA definitions in that such idioms typically represent first-person traumatic effects, or symptoms, in terms of third-person animate subjects that affect patients, urging them to take political action as the only way to healing. The 'urge' that symptoms impose upon patients are often represented by the use of deontic modals of obligation, as illustrated by the extract that follows, drawn from the oral report of an asylum seeker from Sierra Leone, where physical trauma symptoms become 'embodied' by experiential metaphors:

I suffer wind sickness, fonyo kurango we say [in Mandinka], when I smell burning, like my village burning. / Wind attack my brain and rise. I hear wind inside ears, like woo woo (blood-pressure perception → panic attack). It rise rise and press the eyes and I see black and my brain spin and I must fall (fainting). / I must go for pick all them and burn them and them village and them families and so wind must end.

A possible suggestion aimed at the development of a 'hybrid ELF register', therefore, could be to focus on accommodation strategies capable of bringing together both Western pragmatolinguistic conventions of specialized discourse and non-Western idioms of distress and trauma narratives typically marked by deontic modality. One of such strategies – already taken into account in this paper, could be disambiguating metaphors by opting for similes and 'as if' clauses, as illustrated in the example that follows, referred to the extract of the Sierra Leonean refugee reported above:

West-African people usually somatise trauma effects and describe them *as if* they were real beings that *must* attack them – e.g., they describe sensations like feeling woozy, sick and fainting when they recall sensations of panic *as if* wind was blowing in their brain and fog dimming their eyes to make them collapse. Such symptoms *must* be treated by helping patients to achieve social justice within their own communities.

3. Conclusion

This paper has introduced three case studies analyzing the ways in which Italian experts in intercultural mediation using their own expanding-circle ELF variation interact with West-African migrants who, in turn, use their own nativized outer-circle ELF variation (NPE and Krio). The enquiry has illustrated the extent to which both interacting groups differently interpret events by activating in their minds their different native linguacultural schemata which, as expected, eventually come into conflict, causing misunderstanding. The objective of these three case studies, therefore, has been to show evidence of the extent to which each participant actually transfers native experiential, socio-cultural and pragmalinguistic schemata to the ELF variation that each of them uses in intercultural communication. And yet, it has been observed that each of participant in the intercultural interaction perceives the other participants' ELF variations in use as 'deviant' and pragmatically 'marked' with reference to the native-speaker English norms. Hence, in consideration of the unequal type of such encounters, the paper has suggested that, in order to achieve successful communication, the Western experts in charge of such interactions should develop ELF-mediated accommodation strategies of specialized-discourse hybridization and reformulation, so as to make different culture-bound discourses conceptually accessible and socially acceptable to all the participants in intercultural interactions. It has been argued that such accommodation strategies are all the more crucial when critical contexts – such as migration contexts – are concerned. This would therefore entail the need for developing ELF-mediated hybrid registers both shaping and being shaped by the participants' native language typologies, subjective cognitive stances, and communicative behaviours, which come to be automatically transferred into the ELF variations they use. This is assumed to encourage new social practices that – especially when associated to migration and asylum contexts – are expected to promote the co-construction of fair and ethical intercultural actions.

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