Defining English as a professional lingua franca: a specialised approach

L'anglais comme lingua franca *professionnelle : une approche spécialisée*

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Introduction

1   English is currently becoming a global lingua franca enabling millions of professionals to deal with their day-to-day activities. More particularly in France, English has become a professional skill, among many others, enabling professionals to fulfill a very wide range of purposes and handle genres from an equally wide range of domains and activity types. A problem emerges when one wonders what unifies English as a professional lingua franca, since the phenomenon emerges from extremely diverse situations, which jeopardises any attempts to conceptualise it as a specialised variety. English as a professional lingua franca may not be considered as a unified domain with clear-cut boundaries. Rather, it is a multidisciplinary field of study involving various forms of knowledge such as English as a lingua franca, business and professional discourse analysis (PDA), business and management studies, politeness theory, terminology, conversation analysis, ethnography, computer-mediated communication, and corpus analysis. The field is given coherence by a focus on the central concept of English used by professionals of other languages than English where the word "professional" refers to activities involving some form of specialised knowledge, whether this knowledge has to do with purely business or with other specialised activity fields such as engineering, medical consultations, trials, management, etc. Since English has become the world's lingua franca in many professional domains, we assume that English as a professional lingua franca is not only concerned with a common core of features which have developed outside the native circles but also with professionally-bound features which are developing within global, specialised networks of professionals who are, in many cases, interconnected by technology. In this particular regard, English as a professional lingua

franca is not entirely unlike the original lingua franca, the language used by merchants across Mediterranean ports for fulfilling their specialised purposes where, for example, advances in "nautical techniques, e.g., compass, rigging and hull design" increased the "rate and pace of communication" (Wansborough 1996: 1) and led to the emergence of common, structural and linguistic elements across business documents such as letters or property conveyances (*ibidem*: 97) .

2   The example of the Mediterranean pidgin finds many echoes in today's professional world in which technology allows direct contacts between professionals on a global scale and on a daily basis. These daily, direct contacts between professionals are, at least in our view, an essential feature of globalisation and an essential factor of the specialisation of today's lingua franca. ELF is not only used as a business language, i.e. a language for fulfilling commercial purposes (Koester 2010a), but also as a specialised language fulfilling the specialised needs of professionals whose cultures, habits and priorities tend to differ significantly from each other as we will see in the cases of engineers, project managers and human resource employees. The distinction between "business" and "professional" provides the basis for a definition of English as a professional lingua franca and then leads to some methodological and pedagogical implications.

1. Discourse in professional settings

1.1. Workplace discourse

3   Early studies of discourse occurring in the workplace have led to the identification of characteristics which are now the distinguishing marks of workplace genres. The first characteristic relates to discourse orientation towards an institutional or organisational talk, thus giving to the context a critical role in the interpretation of the text. The following extract from Heritage and Sefi (1992) presents a conversation between a British health visitor and a patient. Although the topic seems trivial, considering the context, notably the fact that health visitors are supposed to be "fully and completely involved in the giving of advice and support" (*ibidem*: 406), the exchange may be interpreted as fulfilling a relational purpose, that of establishing contact and preparing the ground for further, more technical issues:

> "Two cats"
> "We've got three actually"
> "Oh, goodness" (*ibidem*: 406)

4   This example illustrates the fact that "it is not always possible to find an exact correlation between the form of linguistic resources (be they lexico-grammatical or discoursal) and the functional value they assume in discourse" (Bhatia 1993: 15). A second characteristic also emerging from the example is the existence of "frontstage" and "backstage" talk as two distinctive discursive zones in which the former is defined as the "public face of the workplace" (Sarangi & Roberts 1999: 22) as in the case of doctor-patient interactions and where the latter is defined as discourse occurring between experts away from the "drama" of frontstage work activities (*ibidem*: 23). A third characteristic of workplace discourse is the existence of structuring, professional activities such as problem-solving and promoting, which then develop into a continuum of genre realisations.

5   The "discursive turn" which took place in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Nickerson 2005: 369) inevitably led to a prototypical and somewhat idealised view of workplace discourse,

that is a default theoretical stance in which discourse is conceived in situations involving native speakers with clearly defined hierarchical and rhetorical roles (doctor/patient, superior/subordinate, expert/non-expert, etc.). In this framework, genres are portrayed as models growing on fairly solid, theoretical and methodological grounds, as the linguistico-discursive phenomena generated by more fluid contextual features such as technology and non-native usages are relegated to the level of variation. The relegation process is particularly salient in studies of highly codified genres such as business letters where the discursive variations from the native, ideal, letter model are presented as deviant forms:

> While the non-native speaker letters contained some ungrammatical expressions and unorthodox forms, the analysis revealed that the most striking difference between the native and non-native speaker letters was in style. Several of the non-native speaker letters gave the impression of being somehow too casual, too desperate, too personal, or too detached. Although there was considerable variation in the native speaker letters, they all appeared to be more "professional." (Maier 1992: 194)

6   However, since the late 1990s and early 2000s, some studies have led to the idea that workplace discourse in general and workplace genres in particular are far from being the clear-cut realities they were originally thought to be. First, the development of ELF and corpus-based studies led to a shift from the normative paradigm to a multi-facetted one. In the new paradigm, deviations from the norm were observed for their own sake, that is as naturally occurring phenomena arising from legitimate, workplace settings where genres "mix" with, or "colonise" other genres (Bhatia 2002: 49). Secondly, in-depth, ethnographic approaches to genres suggest that the hybridisation processes may be explained not only by the generic proximity in both space (the workplace) and time (the working hours) but, also, by the "technologization of professional discourse", a process in which "the relationship between near and distant, now and then, is transformed" (Gunnarsson 2009: 10). For example, Louhiala-Salminen's observation of a manager (Louhiala-Salminen 2002) shows that email acts as a pivotal genre with other genres in the thirty-four discoursal episodes which emerged from a single workplace, within a single day.

1.2. Business English as a Lingua Franca

7   Studies in email discourse in corporate and multinational settings have indeed provided evidence that email has been playing a leading role in the expansion of English as a lingua franca in "the international business community" (Nickerson 2005: 368). Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF), for example, is generally defined as a global variety deriving from the diversity of international exchanges and the expansion of computer-mediated communication. It is a "high stakes" variety (Shaw 2011) generating general discourse strategies such as letting errors pass (Firth 1996) or "accommodating down" from standard English (Koester 2010a). More specific BELF features, particularly in emails, have also been identified such as regular code switching in opening and closing phrases, standard letter genre conformity (Millot 2014) including "outdated phraseology" (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta 2005: 78), which suggests that BELF writers do not use a simplified version of standard English but resort to the standard and the naturally diversified linguistic material at hand to creatively achieve their business purposes. In

other words, BELF studies tend to reflect the problematic nature of ELF which is summarised by Seidlhofer (2011: 110) as follows:

> ELF is not a variety of English with clearly demarcated formal linguistic properties
> to be set against some institutionalized norm of the so-called standard language,
> but as the variable exploitation of linguistic resources.

8   The author's viewpoint finds further illustrations in ethnographic approaches showing that BELF is a cultural reality where "interactions are inherently intercultural, and are inevitably influenced by the perception people have of themselves, the perception that one has of the interlocutors and the tendency to emphasize differences, often dictated by stereotypes" (Poppi 2012: 179). The unveiled features generally concern code switching, exogenous grammatical patterns leading to accommodation or regularisations, but also discourse-related features such as politeness strategies which are unusual in Anglo-Saxon cultures although they are frequent and considered as generally acceptable in global business communities. Examples of cultural differences in how English is used in lingua franca situations abound in the literature. For example, Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2005) contrast the direct Finnish style with the Swedish tendency to write "wordy" messages. Similarly, in her corpus-based comparison between Chinese and Italian email writers, Poppi (2012) describes the Chinese employees' tendency to "employ a more formal tone and make use of honorifics" than their Italian counterparts (*ibidem*: 197). The identified contrasts confirm earlier studies of politeness strategies (Gumperz 1982; Brown & Levinson 1983) which shed light on the relativity of language norms in intercultural settings and the implication that language norms "can be interpreted and understood only in relation to the background conditions that shape each situation" (Brown & Levinson 1983: 73). However, it is also very clear that the background conditions have mostly been observed through nationally defined cultures. Very little is actually known about the specialised cultures of BELF users today.

1.3. Professional discourse as specialised discourse

9   The specialised features of BELF have generally been analysed from a Swalesian perspective, that is through technical lexis, terminology and "community-specific abbreviations and acronyms" (Swales 1990: 26). According to Nickerson (2000), the specialised features of BELF not only include "technical lexis" which she defines as "what the company [does]" and as the "technical process involved and the goods produced", but also organisational lexis defined as "as lexis denoting the corporate context such as "procedures", "corporate units and positions within the corporate hierarchy" (*ibidem*: 159). Drawing from Bhatia (1993) and Yates and Orlikowski (1992), Kankaaranta (2005) adopts a similar approach to linguistic specialisation by considering it as corporate "jargon" (*ibidem*: 285). More recently, Poppi (2012) has described specialised usages as abbreviated forms of technical vocabulary ("shpt", "vsl", "cnee") which occur more frequently than the full forms themselves ("shipment", "vessel", "consignee") in the international trade industry in China. Lexis therefore appears as a particularly salient area to account for specialised usages in the workplace but also as a limit to the lingua franca metaphor. Contrary to the Mediterranean contact language indeed, today's lingua franca does not borrow its lexis from other languages but literally lends its corporate-bound and technical lexis to its users. The lending phenomenon emerged in our interviews with French corporate employees who, although they spoke French, would
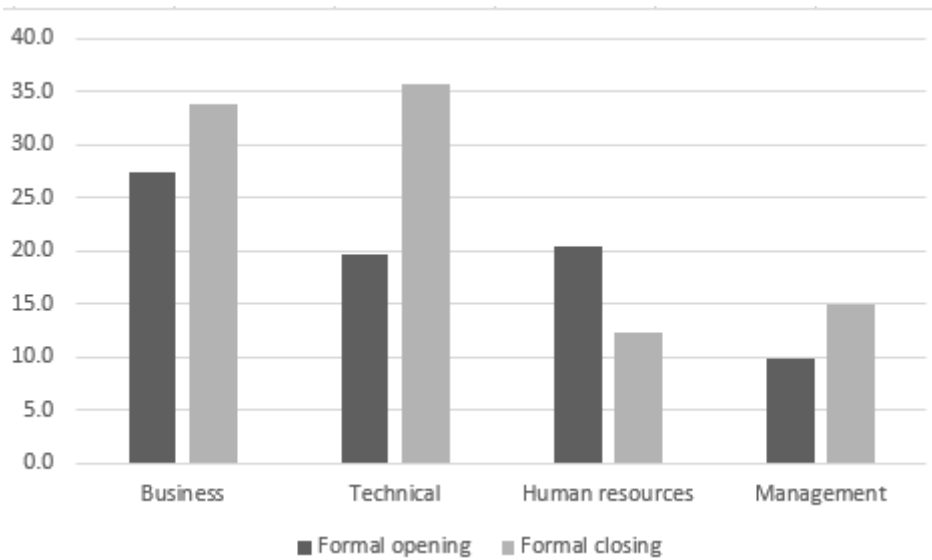
regularly use corporate-bound and technical lexis such as "business unit", "project leader", "strategic accounts manager", or "community manager".

10   As Bhatia (1993) claims however, specialised usages in the workplace extend beyond lexis into "syntax, or even discourse" (*ibidem*: 26). In his seminal book, the author demonstrates that lexis, syntax and discourse are structured by specific professional settings. The variations according to the professional setting have indeed been evidenced by the author himself through the analysis of two different settings. In business contexts, promotional activities act as a unifying, structuring purpose for the genres thus leading to structural and lexico-grammatical similarities between sales letters and job applications. In legal discourse, the purposes of "imposing obligations" and "conferring rights" (*ibidem*: 102) also act as unifying and structuring purposes for legislative provisions and legal cases. The fact that knowledge structuring is specific to the professional setting has also been evidenced by Mourlhon-Dallies (2008) who uses the notion of "professional logic" which she defines as a set of structural and lexico-grammatical features shaping discourse and revealing specific ways of thinking within a professional domain. Professional logics are therefore at the heart of professional cultures since they reveal what matters in a professional domain:

> In mechanical engineering, contrary to computer engineering, the questions of failure and unexpected events, of the general and the particular, do not constitute an area where discourse is focalised. Machines work. Their technology is controlled. The unexpected has no place in the documents we examined since it is synonymous for defectiveness. (*ibidem*: 161, our translation)[1]

11   Since the early 1990's and the spread of communication technologies allowing (specialised) professionals to communicate on a global level, which in turn has led to the spread of English as a lingua franca, little attention has been paid to inter-domain variations within professional discourse. The studies mentioned so far have indeed focused on discourse variation within particular genres, irrespective of the professional or specialised cultures. However, variations are particularly salient, as the data from our own corpus illustrates. Figure 1 shows that the frequency of two basic formal features of email correspondence, namely opening and closing phrases, present significant variations according to the professional situation: business and technical situations emerge as the most formal cases as opposed to human resources and management situations.

Figure 1. Distribution of formal opening and closing phrases across four professional situations in professional ELF emails (percentage of total messages, N=300)

40.0

35.0

30.0

25.0

20.0

15.0

10.0

5.0

0.0

Business   Technical   Human resources   Management

■ Formal opening   ■ Formal closing

12 Example 1 illustrates the formality of email exchanges in business situations. Both messages, albeit short, contain most typical structural features one might expect from a formal letter, e.g. an object, a standard epistolary opening phrase ("Dear [forename]"), a main body, a closing phrase ("Best regards"), and a signature:

> **Example 1.** Email exchange from the business domain
> *Message 1. Email sent by a French sales manager to a Japanese customer.*
> Object: Quality Claim No.[ref00]
> Dear Mr [surname202],
> We transmitted your claim to our quality dept. The answer from our quality dept
> will follow.
> Best regards
> [name203]
> *Message 2. Email reply from the Japanese customer*
> Dear [forename203],
> Thanks your e-mail.
> However, could you please push your quality dept. to reply within today so that we
> can give your comment to [orgNameD07] today?
> Best regards
> [name202]

13 These formal features not only serve the formal expectations business partners typically have in this domain but also contribute to maintaining a sense of "normality" (Firth 1990), thus compensating for linguistic problems EFL users regularly encounter in their business correspondence.

14 The example above contrasts with the email exchanges from our "project management" subcorpus in which French managers from the industrial sector are less intent on maintaining business relationships than on solving problems as they emerge from their email boxes or mobile phones:

> **Example 2.** Email exchanges from the management domain.
> *Message 1. Email sent by a French global accounts manager to another French co-worker*
> *from the same company*
> Object: [ref00] review
> How did it go today?
> You need me for anything?
> [name53]

Message 2. The partner's reply to message 1
Object: [ref00] review
We have finished
I will give you a call

15   The exchange above illustrates our ethnographic findings showing that 47% of French employees working on a global scale use English as a default language in their written communication.[2] The exchange also illustrates Louhiala-Salminen's observation of "discourse sequences" (Louhiala-Salminen 2002) in which managers are involved. Due to the multi-modal nature of the manager's job, emails tend to take on conversational features such as the direct question ("how did it go today?"), the elliptical style ("you need me for anything?"), and the cohesive marker "it" referring to the immediate context of the situation (here, a meeting). As in the previous example, discourse is structured or, rather, "conversationalised" (Fairclough 1992), by the very nature of global management involving a considerable amount of informal communication on various channels within small, specialised networks (Zarifian 1996; Mintzberg 2009) who share the same specialised context.[3.] What has been observed qualitatively in the literature may be evidenced quantitatively by studying the frequency of exophoric features, that is linguistic elements such as articles, pronouns, and demonstratives referring to the context of the situation. As figure 2 shows, exophoric features are more frequent in our management subcorpus than in the other professional situations.

Figure 2. Distribution of exophoric features across four professional situations in professional ELF emails (per thousand words, N=25,383)
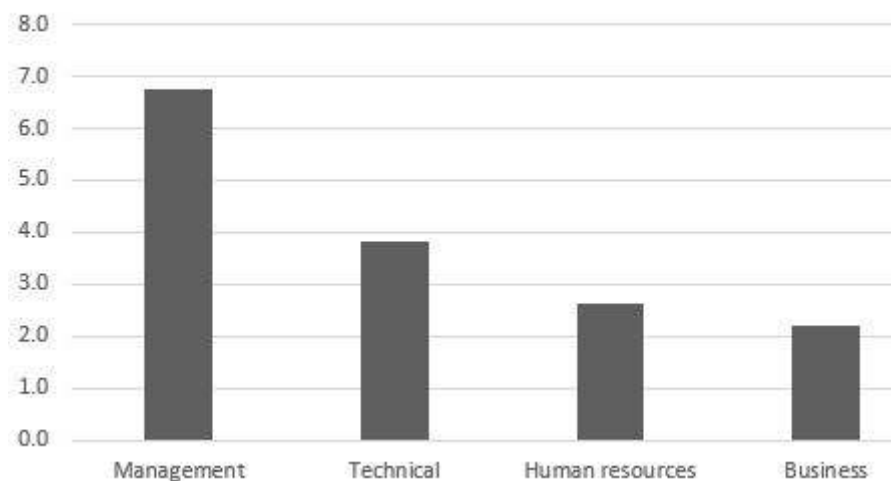
16   Our third example presents yet a different case where Human Resources employees seek the paradoxical purposes of maintaining good relationships within the company (here a company specialising in cochlear implants) and imposing corporate rules. The sometimes conflicting purposes appear in example 3 through the extensive use of procedural phraseology ("our HR procedure", "all induction trainings must be done", "upgrading our procedures") and face-preserving strategies, such as using the informal opening phrase ("good morning") or code switching to the recipient's mother tongue ("ciao") which frame the formality of the message thus attenuating its illocutionary force:

Example 3. Email from the Human Resources domain. Message sent by a French HR employee to an Italian clinical engineer
Object: New Starter - [name406]

> Good morning [forename132],
> According to our HR procedure (Recruitment [ref00]) available on [ref01] all induction trainings must be done as soon as a new employee joins [orgNameA0].
> HR must ensure that all mandatory trainings are scheduled and done especially for sensitive positions like Clinical Specialists. If the deadlines are not met, HR would face an internal dysfunctionment which would be not fair after the strong efforts we have made in upgrading our procedures.
> Thanks.
> Ciao.
> [name11]

17   As our three examples attempt to show, the realisations of professional genres such as emails are highly dependent upon the specialised nature of the situations in which the professionals are engaged.

2. Defining English as a professional lingua franca

2.1. Critique of professionals as discourse communities

18   The view that professionals and their discourse practices may be described in terms of "discourse communities" is commonly shared by most researchers working in the field of PDA. The notion of "discourse community" defined by Swales as members sharing similar goals and "mechanisms of intercommunication" (Swales 1990: 24-5) leads to a powerful, though rigid conception of what professionals have in common – namely, a shared professional identity. This view has gained increasing support in PDA studies that have tried to model discourse as genres and registers, which, because they are extensively taught and possess a powerful, symbolic force, have led to an "idealised" (Bhatia 2002: 48) and somewhat simplified view of professional discourse in general. Modelling groups of professionals into "communities" may therefore be misleading, since it tends to underestimate the inherent complexity of professional discourse. This type of discourse is indeed marked by social and organisational tensions within discourse communities, even in situations where professionals should co-operate and collaborate (Sarangi 2002). As a result, many researchers, including Bhatia himself, have called for a broader and multi-dimensional approach to PDA. For example, by using the concept of relational genres, Koester (2006, 2010a) contributes to an ongoing paradigm shift from community membership to relational practice which is defined not only by the discursive activities themselves, but also by the relationships professionals have with each other. Exploring the issue of relationship indeed sheds lights on the fact that many professionals may perfectly be engaged in the same discursive events without necessarily belonging to the same discourse "community". In the business field for example, customers and suppliers are involved in the same communicative situations although they do not necessarily belong to the same fields of activity. A similar observation can be made with HR employees who, although they do share the same workplace and are involved in the same communicative situations as other professionals from the same company, seek quite different professional purposes, as in the case presented in example 3. Therefore the notion of discourse community, as an essentially rhetorically-based concept for observing professional discourse, is not entirely helpful, since many parts of professional discourse occur in situations involving professionals from various specialised domains, as Poncini's study of an international event in the wine industry suggests:

The event, which took place in Valtellina in the Lombardy region, brought together wine producers from Italy (mainly Valtellina and Piedmont), the U.S. (California, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Washington State), Mexico, Australia, South Africa, and Switzerland. Other participants included vineyard owners, journalists, researchers, and experts on viticulture and wine from around the word; members of the local community; others involved in the organisation. Thus different professional communities were involved. (Poncini 2005: 205-206)

2.2. English as a professional lingua franca: looking at backstage discourse

19   A great deal of workplace communication in English as a lingua franca occurs within dense, specialised networks (Millot 2014) involving experts who may or may not share the same disciplinary background but who work collaboratively on the same projects. Contrary to professional communities which are defined by more or less stable purposes, professional networks are unstable by nature. They are described from the point of view of individuals whose socio-professional network develops and disappears once the activity is over. One particular interesting phenomenon in workplace communication is the development of international, specialised "clusters" of professionals which we define as interconnected professionals who use different mother tongues and work jointly in English on specialised subjects. These professionals are very often involved in backstage activities, that is activities in which they leave their "professional self" in order to engage in more personal activities such as using humour, sharing worries, and the like. As Sarangi and Roberts (1999) indicate, the "back regions" are particularly prone to "shifts in register" (*ibidem*: 22), which shows that the professionals in the cluster not only share the same purposes and specialised, contextual information but also personal information such as emotions or anecdotes. Studies in professional email communication (Gimenez 2000; Nickerson 2000; Kankaanranta 2005) have repeatedly shown this feature of specialised communication whereby participants discard their formal, status-bound selves for more informal and personal ones. Example 4 illustrates this kind of register shift. In this email, the French HR employee leaves his administrative self to engage more personally with a Swedish engineer:

> **Example 4.** Email from our HR subcorpus. A French HR employee writes to a Swedish engineer
> Hi [forename11],
> This is great news!!!
> When you come to Sweden I will buy you a glass of Swedish Champagne [i.e. Absolut Vodka] ;)
> Once again, thank you so much [forename11]
> [forename13]

20   Thanks to the development of computer-mediated communication and new forms of network-based management (Mintzberg 2009) leading employees to work collaboratively on a global scale, this form of talk has expanded and has become a core feature of English as a professional lingua franca.

2.3. English as a professional lingua franca: looking at frontstage discourse

21   English as a professional lingua franca also covers more official forms of communication in which English serves the purposes of official, international communication. Following the tradition of international language designs such as Odgen's BASIC English, new norms of English such as Carterpillar's English, IBM's "Easy English", Rolls Royce's "simplified technical English" have developed to meet the specialised needs of professionals working across national cultures. These needs mostly include the making of official, technical documents such as user manuals and style guides. The ASD-STE100 norm, developed in 1979 by the aerospace industry, is yet another example of a technical lingua franca. The original language, English, is reduced to a set of sixty style recommendations and 6,000 word entries with restricted meanings. As the extract below shows, the language was explicitly tailored to the needs of non-native professionals:

> The international language of the aerospace industry is English, and English is the language most used for writing technical documentation. However, it is often not the native language of the readers of such documentation. Many readers have a knowledge of English that is limited, and are easily confused by complex sentences and by the number of meanings and synonyms which English words can have.₁

22   Apart from technical domains, English is also used as an administrative lingua franca in European institutions, showing that professional ELF may not be considered solely as a simplified version of "real" or "authentic" English but, on the contrary, as a variety embracing the features of other specialised cultures which have developed outside the native circles (namely, Britain, Ireland, the U.S.A., and Australia). In their study of Euro-English, Jenkins *et al.* (2001) singled out a few administrative idioms, such as that of "member state" which directly emerged from the European institutions and provide some evidence of English increasing its meaning potential rather than reducing it. Another case of this increasing potential comes from nativisation processes stemming from the co-existence of several socio-cultural and linguistic frameworks where local identities find themselves embedded in global markets. Although Gunnarsson (2009) associates the phenomenon with large organisations, we find that what is sometimes referred to as a "glocal" phenomenon is particularly salient in smaller professional organisations, especially in the French *terroirs*. For instance, the association for Médoc Wines (*Conseil des Vins du Médoc*) publishes a website where keywords and expressions of French origin such as "châteaux", the "crus artisans" and "appellations" –not to mention the word "*terroir*" itself– are part of the specialised discourse of wine professionals seeking to promote their local identity in English. Other less obvious examples may also be found in *terroirs* where local industries are involved in a global market. The Jura-based, watch-making company Pequignet uses some lexis on its website to promote the French, specialised know-how in the highly competitive world market of luxury watches. The CEO's message to potential customers is a case in point. Words such as "*atelier*" or " *manufacture*" are strategically used in their French meaning for promoting the local, specialised culture of watch making:

> Pequignet has succeeded to [sic] remain an independent atelier. It is a true symbol of French enterprise as it embodies the French spirit of watch-making, being the only true 'Manufacture' in the French Jura. [...] As with other countries in Europe who have a proud heritage of watch-making, Pequignet's production is now

entirely based in France and we aim to work with French producers to promote French industry.[5]

23   It is also worth noticing that some forms such as "succeed to remain" or "promote French industry", although they may be negatively appraised, seem legitimately used since most targeted readers are likely to be found in the other expanding circles of English such as Eastern Europe or Asia.

2.4. Professional ELF as a specialised variety

24   Since professional discourse obviously covers situations ranging from the most technical or obscure to outsiders (e.g. exchanges between engineers or technicians) to the most ordinary and apparently clear situations (e.g. gossip, office talk), one may wonder what unifies professional ELF and whether it is possible to consider it as a specialised domain within the field of English studies.

25   Along the cline of ordinary talk, it seems that although the forms are not specialised by nature, their meanings may be regarded as specialised in that they are given a specialised interpretation by the social actors engaged in the professional situation. The "cat" example shown earlier shows that, although the word "cat" obviously belongs to the "general domain" of ordinary talk, the main meaning should be interpreted within the framework of medical consultation in that the word establishes a professional relationship between a medical consultant and a patient. The specialised logic also applies to the "Swedish Champagne" example found in our HR corpus of professional ELF where the ordinary language is used for maintaining friendly relationships in a multicultural workplace.

26   At the other end of the cline, we find the cases in which discourse is specialised in the Swalesian sense, i.e. participants produce discourse in situations where the meaning becomes obscure to outsiders. As we mentioned earlier, the situations generally involve participants sharing a great deal of technical, organisational, and discursive knowledge. Meaning opacity may obviously come from terminology or abbreviations which are unknown to the general public or, what is less obvious, from words and expressions which, although they are frequent in general English, bear a meaning which can only be interpreted by those involved in the specialised situation. In the following example, taken from our technical email corpus, the word "bag" has the rather obscure meaning of a small container moving along an industrial chain:

> **Example 5.** Email extract from a technical exchange between French and Danish engineers in the field of electronics
> Object: Little question about routing
> Hello,
> there is no special handling for such a bag. There will be only a warning message to the operator, but the bag will not be rerouted automatically. The operator has to investigate what the reason for the recirculation is and then take the necessary measures (for example extract the bag, change the destination in the flight table, map the destination to another destination).

27   In this framework, ELF, or rather, the fact that professional discourse is produced by natives of other languages than English, may be considered a legitimate, specialised variety of English because it emerges from specialised situations where legitimate professionals carry out activities of many kinds, from the most official to the most confidential, through spoken and written channels. It is worth noting that the increased

range of communicative situations, led by the development of information technologies, tends to reinforce the status of professional ELF as a variety.

3. Methodological implications: professional ELF and the corpus

3.1. Representing professional ELF as a specialised variety

28   Compared with other specialised (scientific or academic) domains where the texts are widely available and therefore allow the building of large corpora (i.e. exceeding one million words), corpora of professional discourse in general and of professional ELF in particular are rather scarce and fairly small. This characteristic is particularly salient in corpora representing backstage situations. In the case of emails in professional or business ELF (Gimenez 2000; Nickerson 2000; Bondi 2005; Kankaanranta 2005; Louhiala-Salminen *et al.* 2005; Gimenez 2006; Jensen 2009), the corpora generally consist of a few hundred messages in spite of the fact that this type of text has become one of the most widespread genres in the workplace with millions of messages sent and received everyday. Moreover, existing corpora generally focus on purely business situations (e.g. selling and buying) to the detriment of other equally widespread, specialised activities such as technical or administrative problem-solving or team management. As we mentioned earlier, this orientation is mostly due to a traditional, business genre-based view of professional discourse.

29   An ambitious attempt at characterising professional ELF from a specialised perspective, that is a corpus allowing for the study of inter-domain variation may actually be found in the professional part of the Vienna-Oxford Corpus of International English (VOICE 2013). The sub-corpus is divided into three sections, each section focusing on a particular area, i.e. "business" ("all social situations connected with activities of making, buying, selling or supplying goods or services for money"), "organisational" (all social situations connected with activities of international organizations or networks which are not doing research or business), and "research and science" ("all social situations connected with the careful study of a subject, especially in order to discover new facts or information about it").[6] These areas may not, however, be regarded as "specialised domains" as defined by Petit (2010) and Van der Yeught (2012), since the purposes are so broadly defined that, although they may help characterise language use in professional context in general, they can hardly allow the identification of specialised meanings which is what corpus analysis in professional contexts should also seek to achieve.

30   In line with previous research into workplace discourse explored through corpus linguistics, we suggest that corpora seeking to represent English as a professional lingua franca should be based on the notion of recurrent situation, which provides "background information [...] useful not only for interpreting the data", but also for "corpus design" (Koester 2010b: 72). According to the systemic functional framework, a situation is defined by three parameters, namely field, mode, and tenor where field refers to the ongoing activity or "domain of experience" (Matthiessen *et al.* 2010: 95), mode refers to "the role played by language in the context" (*ibid.*: 144), and tenor refers to the "role relationships" (*ibid.*: 217). We claim that this framework is broad enough to embrace both frontstage and backstage situations, as shown in table 1.

Table 1. Professional situations: A Systemic Functional perspective for corpus design

Situational parameters	Typical situational features
Field	**Status-bound domains** (e.g. engineering, administration and management, etc.), **disciplinary-bound domains** (electronics, law, business, human resources, etc.)
Mode	**Channel** (written/spoken), **medium** (electronic, face-to-face) Written/spoken, electronic communication, face-to-face, meetings, interviews, **turn** (monologic/ dialogic), **rhetorical** (persuasive, entertaining, informative, etc.)
Tenor	**Institutional roles** (superior/subordinate), **discursive roles** (expert/learner), **familiarity** (degree of intimacy), **status of English** (L1/L2), **network density** (low/high)

## 3.2. Email corpus: a French contribution to professional ELF

31   At least in Europe, most corpora in this field of study originate from Northern and Central European countries such as Finland, Sweden or Austria. Corpora originating from the Southern parts of Europe such as Italy, Spain, or France are extremely few, which, we assume, poses the problem of the nature of ELF both in its general and professional forms. We assume that, although ELF usages present very similar features across linguistic backgrounds, variations according to the professional background have been evidenced, thus requiring a broader approach to ELF including forms deriving from the speakers of Roman languages.

32   Our corpus data consist of 400 emails (33,000 words) collected from fourteen companies based in France and using English as a lingua franca. In all cases, English is used on a day-to-day basis with partners from inside and outside the company. English is also used as a problem-solving language in the four recurrent, professional situations we have identified from the data: business, team management, technical exchanges, and company administration. Business problem-solving includes situations where participants share and discuss information about the buying and selling of goods. The team management situation includes cases where managers coordinate projects of various kinds such as implementing computer systems, or designing furniture. The technical exchanges comprise situations where technicians and engineers share and discuss information about the making of products. The administrative problem-solving situation includes information exchanges from a human resources department in a small multinational firm. In all situations, English is used as a lingua franca alongside French and, in a few cases, other languages like German, Spanish, Italian and Chinese. Our findings suggest that English emerges in emails in specialised networks spreading across professional communities (from business managers to secretaries, from engineers to administrative staff, etc.). Specialised coherence is given by the focus of each professional situation on one particular topic emanating from the network node, that is the professional starting the online discussion. As table 2 seeks to illustrate, subject lines are generally indicative of the specialised nature of the field covered by the discussion.

Table 2. Professional activity types and subject lines in emails

Professional activity type	Subject line examples
Administration	New Starter - [name406] [orgNameA0] Sample salary calculation Bonus Tracking
Business	Quality Claim No.[ref00] Carboabrasive material our modif. ORDER NO.[ref00] The shipping method of [ref00]
Management	Antislip base tests on cast iron: need name of personn responsible [orgNameC01]-Netherlands (Bergen) - New [ref00] Plant [ref00] offer - budgetary estimate for [orgNameC02] Timashevsk
Technical	[ref00] question about 'Pb de stabilité en [ref01]' Incorrect fuel injection volume Evolution of buffer feeding on [ref00] loading station >> [ref01]

33   The network nodes correspond to the email donors who accepted to transmit a part of their routine correspondence in English. By using the literature on social networks (Freeman 1979; Milroy 1987) and, more particularly, that on network visualisation (Freeman 2000; Degenne & Forsé 2004), we represented the socio-professional network of each donor and placed the donor in the middle of the graph. Each recipient list was then used to draw the constellation of partners. Network links were finally represented by a straight line each time a message was shared (written and/or received) by one or several participants. During the representation process, we also obtained some ethnographic information about each point of the network such as the participants' mother tongue, their nationality or the job they occupied when the network was observed. The graphic representation of each network helped us visualise and identify clusters, that is dense parts of the network where emails were sent and received by small sets of quasi- or fully interconnected professionals. An example of a socio-professional cluster may be found on figure 3 with numbers 1, 25, 26, 27, and 28. In these parts, discourse was typical of backstage, specialised talk. Features included problematic issues, informal stretches of discourse, specialised abbreviations, and direct references to the ongoing situation. Some cases of what may be called "specialised cluster talk" may be found in examples 2, 4 and 5 quoted above.

Figure 3. The socio-professional network of a human resources employee (represented as 1 on the figure)
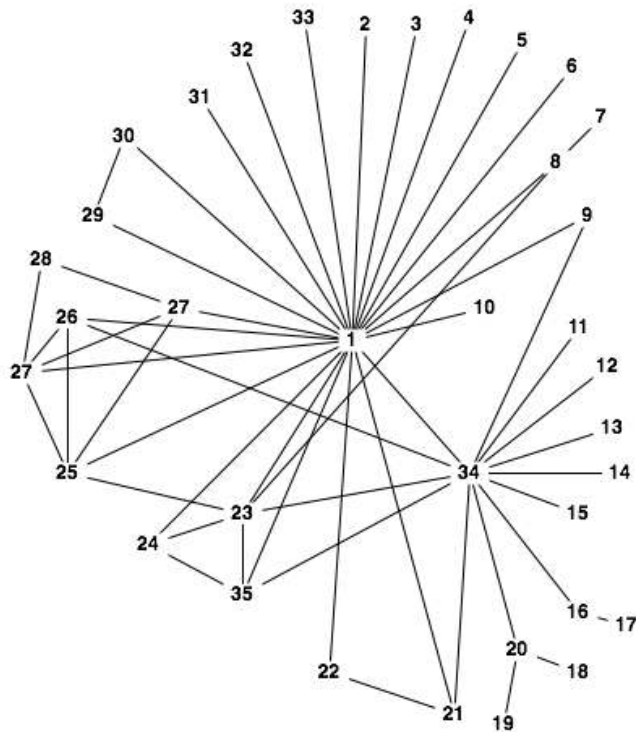
34   The corpus is organised according to the situation type which we define here as a set of systemic parameters (Halliday 2004). The "field parameter" consists of the professional activity type as defined in table 2. The "tenor parameter" includes contextual data such as the status of English among the writers (L1 or L2) and the network density (high *versus* low). The "mode parameter" is not taken into consideration in this corpus since all messages were produced on the same (written) channel and (electronic) medium. The corpus may therefore be considered as a typical sample of professional email exchanges where English is both an international language in that it comprises both L1 and L2 writers, and a lingua franca *stricto sensu* in the case of exchanges between L2 writers. Although the corpus is relatively small, it remains representative of the described situations since, as is often the case in workplace talk, discursive and linguistic features are generally repetitive. Conversely, less repetitive material may sometimes be considered as "key" features, either from a statistical or from a specialised viewpoint. Statistically, keywords are defined as words which are "significantly more frequent in a sample of text than would be expected, given their frequency in a large general reference corpus" (Stubbs 2010: 25).

35   Such words may be identified by using concordance tools such as AntConc (Anthony 2006). "Fuel injection volume", for example, may be considered as a key phrase of the technical subcorpus, since it is obviously over-represented compared with the other subcorpora and, more generally, with any corpus of general English. Specialised keywords, on the other hand, are cultural entities, which are not statistically defined and which, as Wierzbicka (1997) suggests, are "a focal point around which entire cultural domains are organised" (*ibidem*: 156). The word "bag" described in example 5 above is a case in point: although it may not be statistically significant, it is culturally relevant in that, at least in the technical exchanges between engineers in electronics, it is clearly a focal point around which the specialised activity is organised.

36   In addition to corpus data, our study of professional ELF was complemented by some ethnographic research which allowed us to explore the functions of English in the French workplace according to the different activity types. This sort of data was obtained through interviews, field work and an online survey on the socio-professional network *LinkedIn.*[7] As the literature on corpus-based research suggests, ethnographic data may provide insights into the corpus analysis of specialised language and discourse. In this area of knowledge, specialised meanings are regarded as a complex intertwining of language and domains including "more global, encompassing social as well as international and cognitive issues" (Schulze & Römer 2008: 266).

Conclusion

Implications for English for specific purposes and anglais de spécialité

37   The notion of lingua franca in professional situations is only one tenor-related parameter alongside others such as the institutional or the discursive roles taken by the participants. Although it may be studied for its own sake, English as a professional lingua franca should not be treated as a "special" or "separate" variety either in *anglais de spécialité* (ASP) or in English for specific purposes (ESP) but rather as a typical or recurrent situation within the overarching domain of PDA which comprises all the relevant parameters for studying the discourse and the language found in all kinds of professional contexts. Since professional situations may also be defined according to the parameter of activity field, and since field obviously plays a leading role in linguistic and discursive realisations, it is possible to consider PDA as an overarching domain within ASP and ESP studies comprising smaller domains which may in turn be more or less broadly defined according to the field of activities and knowledge they cover. This leads us to define professional discourse as "specialised discourse" in the French sense of the term, that is "knowledge and practice used for a similar purpose" (Van der Yeught 2012: 13).[8] In this category, the purpose in question may be defined by using the notion of professional situation as defined earlier. Quite recently, this specialised approach to PDA was echoed in the *Journal of Business Communication* which became the *Journal of Business and Professional Communication.* According to the editor, adding the word "professional" refers to the consideration of both business and "other fields such as technical or scientific communication" (Dubinski 2014: 3).

Pedagogical implications

38   The need for a more specialised approach to the teaching of English for professional purposes is emphasised by Bhatia (2008) who observes that

> one of the major criticisms of teaching English for Specific (professional) Purposes has been that although students, when placed in professional settings, can handle the textual features of some of professional genres, they are still unaware of the discursive realities of the professional world. (*ibidem:* 161)

39   As previously shown in this article, this may be explained by the fact that professional genres tend to be taught independently from domains and by applying the teaching of "business" genres to all kinds of situations. Our study suggests, however, that situational

parameters such as field (variation according to the activity type) and tenor (variation according to the status of English) should also be taken into consideration since they are constitutive of and significantly influence professional realities. Emails, for example, are clearly colonised by conversational features in the manager's situation because of the highly cooperative nature of the manager's job. Conversely, they have remained a fairly formal, epistolary genre in other situations such as business or human resources situations where the communicative expectations derive from a shared service-provider's culture. This observation calls for a multi-facetted approach to teaching professional discourse in English. In this specialised approach, linguistic features should not be studied as isolated, idealised models but, on the contrary, as inseparable from professional cultures.

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NOTES

1. En mécanique, à la différence de l'informatique, la question de l'échec, de l'imprévu, du général et du particulier, ne constitue pas un point de focalisation du discours. Les machines marchent, leur technologie est maîtrisée. L'incertain n'a pas sa place dans les documents examinés car il sera synonyme de défectuosité.

2. The figure is taken from a longitudinal study conducted on the socio-professional network *LinkedIn* involving 64 French participants using English as a working language. To the question "why do you use English in your email correspondence?", 58% answered "it is the language of my business partners", 47% answered "I use English by default in my professional emails", and 34% answered "it is the 'official' language in the company".

3. According to our study of emails exchanged by French professionals in English, almost 70% of messages are exchanged within networks of 2 to 5 participants.

4. Retrieved from <http://www.asd-ste100.org/> on 10 February 2015.

5. Retrieved from <http://en.pequignet.com/message-from-the-president> on 10 February 2015.

6. Retrieved from <http://www.univie.ac.at/voice/page/corpus_information > on 10 February 2015.

7. Retrieved from <https://fr.linkedin.com/> on 5 January 2015.

8. "[U]n ensemble de connaissances et/ou de pratiques mis au service d'une même finalité"

ABSTRACTS

This article examines English as a professional lingua franca, a field of study lying at the intersection of Professional Discourse Analysis (PDA) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). The discussion begins with an overview of the traditional approaches to professional discourse where English is mostly conceived as a business language and where the specialised aspects are generally relegated to the realms of technical lexis. It then proceeds with a short typology of English as a professional lingua franca by using the Goffmanian metaphor of frontstage and backstage discourse. Finally, it presents some methodological and pedagogical implications through the presentation of a professional ELF corpus which is tailored to the needs of professional or specialised discourse analysis.

Dans cet article, nous proposons d'examiner l'anglais comme *lingua franca* professionnelle que nous présentons comme un champ d'études à l'intersection de l'analyse des discours professionnels et de l'anglais comme *lingua franca* (ELF). Notre discussion commence par un passage en revue des approches traditionnelles de l'analyse de discours professionnels où l'anglais est essentiellement conçu comme une langue d'affaires et où les aspects spécialisés sont généralement relégués au domaine des lexiques techniques. Nous poursuivons par une typologie de l'anglais comme *lingua franca* professionnelle à partir de la métaphore goffmanienne des discours officiels et officieux. Enfin, nous présentons quelques implications méthodologiques et pédagogiques à partir d'un corpus d'anglais comme *lingua franca* professionnelle conçu pour répondre aux besoins de l'analyse des discours professionnels ou spécialisés.

INDEX

Keywords: business English, corpus analysis, English as a professional lingua franca, professional discourse analysis, specialised discourse, specialised network
Mots-clés: analyse de corpus, analyse des discours professionnels, anglais comme lingua franca professionnelle, anglais des affaires, discours spécialisé, réseau spécialisé

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