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Trabajo de Fin de Grado

Identity Construction through Study Abroad

The Role of English as a Lingua Franca

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This thesis is submitted for the degree of English Studies

Date: June 2023

Tutora: Vasilica Mocanu-Florea

Signature:

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## Abstract

English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) is the main vehicle of communication amongst speakers with different first languages (Seidlhofer, 2005). Previous research on identity reflected through ELF, especially in a study abroad (SA) context, has sometimes shown contradictory results. Similarly, the existence of different terms to refer to the same phenomenon, such as “English as an international Language” (EIL) (Jenkins, 2015) has brought some confusion to this area of research. This research project studies the role of ELF in identity-construction processes among Erasmus university students. The data examined in this dissertation has been obtained during the academic year 2021–2022 through semi-structured interviews with two international students from Italy and Japan at Aarhus University (AU), Denmark. The data was examined by means of thematic analysis (Dawadi, 2020; Peel, 2020). Results reveal that participants in higher education mobility programmes show a positive linguistic progress in the usage of ELF that also impacts their personality traits, like their confidence and self-esteem, as well as their Intercultural Competence (IC) (Byram *et al.*, 2001; Savicki, 2008) through the identification of “linguacultural” (Eckert, 2006: 110) links within a community of practice (Lewis, 1969), and by the use of the experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1974). This study indicates that the identity evolution and portrayal of SA students at AU is favorable towards the EU and its integration principles, as envisioned by several researchers (Ambrosi, 2013; King *et al.*, 2003; García-Murias *et al.*, 2016; Mitchell, 2012), but detrimental in relation to the local language and Danes’ general personality features [similar conclusions were encountered by Mocanu (2019)]. The results also point to a general need for more pragmatic programs with ELF as the main language for English Language Teaching (ELT).

## Keywords

*English as a Lingua Franca*, identity, mobility programme, Erasmus, study abroad.

## Resumen

El Inglés como *Lingua Franca* (ELF) es el principal vehículo de comunicación entre hablantes cuyas lenguas maternas varían las unas de las otras (Seidlhofer, 2005). Investigaciones previas sobre el reflejo de la identidad a través de ELF, especialmente en un contexto de estudios en el extranjero (SA), usualmente han mostrados resultados contradictorios. Similarmente, la existencia de diferentes términos para referirse al mismo fenómeno, tal como al «Inglés como Lengua Internacional» (EIL) (Jenkins, 2015), ha traído confusión a esta área de investigación. Este proyecto de investigación estudia el rol de ELF en procesos de construcción de identidad entre estudiantes universitarios Erasmus. Los datos examinados en la tesis fueron obtenidos durante el curso académico 2021–2022 a través de entrevistas semiestructuradas con dos estudiantes internacionales en la Universidad de Aarhus (AU), Dinamarca. La información adquirida fue estudiada mediante el análisis temático (Dawadi, 2020; Peel, 2020). Los resultados revelan que los participantes en programas de movilidad de educación superior muestran un progreso lingüístico positivo respecto al uso de ELF, que, a su vez, impacta en sus características personales, como en la confianza y la autoestima, al igual que su Competencia Intercultural (IC) (Byram *et al.*, 2001; Savicki, 2008) a través de la identificación de enlaces “linguaculturales” (Eckert, 2006: 110) encontrados dentro de una comunidad de prácticas (Lewis, 1969; Wenger, 1999), y por el uso del ciclo de aprendizaje experiencial de Kolb (1974). Este estudio indica que el desarrollo y representación de la evolución identitaria en estudiantes SA en AU es favorable hacia la UE, al igual que a sus principios de integración, tal como visualizaban algunos investigadores (Ambrosi, 2013; King *et al.*, 2003; García-Murias *et al.*, 2016; Mitchell, 2012), pero perjudiciales hacia la lengua local y las características generales de personalidad de los daneses [conclusiones similares fueron también dadas por Mocanu (2019)]. Asimismo, los resultados apuntan a la necesidad general de programas más pragmáticos con ELF como el principal idioma vehicular para la Enseñanza de la Lengua Inglesa (ELT).

## Palabras Clave

Inglés como Lengua Internacional, Inglés como *Lingua Franca*, Erasmus, identidad, programa de movilidad.

Morato Casillas, Carla Victoria v

“All the world’s a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players.”

(Shakespeare, 1623: 64)

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## List of Abbreviations

The following chart explains the abbreviations employed throughout the thesis:

<b>Abbreviations</b>	<b>Definition</b>
AU	Aarhus University
EIL	English as an International Language
ELF	English as a Lingua Franca
ESL	English as a Second Language
IC	Intercultural Competence
L1	First/Mother-Tongue Language
L2	Second Language
SA	Study Abroad
WE	World Englishes

## Introduction

The present dissertation delves into ELF and the identity changes that Erasmus students go through during SA. It aims to shed light on the ways in which SA students reshape their identities through SA. Especially relevant to this identity construction process is the role of ELF, as it can be elicited from the participants' interviews. This research project is divided into four main sections.

The first chapter is the literature review, which contains the theoretical background of the research topic. The terms "EIL" and "ELF" are examined and correlated with other significant concepts, such as, "WE," or "global language," by explaining their historical origins, placing them in the current context of our globalised world, and analysing an established methodology for categorising the different types of WE referred to in Kachru's Concentric Circles model (1985). Secondly, the literature review also elaborates on the concept of identity. It defines the term, and describes the manner in which it is associated with language and language learning. Specifically, it studies the form in which, when using ELF to communicate, the language reflects the community and the speaker's cultural background.

This first part of the project concludes with the identity-changing process that SA students undergo. It remarks the relevance of identity evolution in SA for this thesis, and it details the processes by which SA students acquire new knowledge based on David Kolb's experiential learning cycle (1974).

The methodology section outlines the objectives of the thesis, and describes the thematic analysis research framework employed for the analysis. It also presents the research design subdivided into: location, participants, and procedure.

The results chapter includes the relevant findings of the study. For better understanding, these have been divided into 3 subsections: 1) ELF in the participants' discourse; 2) the ELF role in SA students' identity; and 3) ELF and identity changes during SA.

Finally, the last section summarises the findings of the study, and it contrasts and compares them to those of previous studies on the same topics. It ends with the limitations of the study and a few recommendations for further research.

## 1. Literature Review

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first place, the meaning, origin, and subsequent development of the concept of ELF are explained. Secondly, the chapter presents the relationship between ELF and identity. The final section delves into the role of ELF in identification processes of SA students.

### 1.1. The Concepts of EIL and ELF

This subsection focuses on the differences and parallelisms between the concepts of EIL and ELF in the current context of a globalised world. It also introduces Kachru's Concentric Circles model (1985) as a first step in our understanding of the role of English in the world and its relevance for the present study.

Globalisation is a process which, according to Held *et al.* (1999):

“embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions –assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity, and impact– generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power” (p. 16).

The evolution of the above-mentioned process is mainly visible during the XIX c. and XX c., due to the expansion of, on the one hand, the British Empire during Imperialism and the Industrial Revolution; and, on the other hand, to the increasing protagonism of the United States, who, mostly incentivised by the Cold War against Russia in the XX c., achieved to maintain this “anglo-power” worldwide. The actions of these countries throughout these periods of time marked the beginning of an era of increasing evolution in communication technologies, the emergence “of multinational organisations” (Crystal, 2003: 10), and the globalisation of the English language, too, which began by accomplishing a “special role” (Crystal, 2003: 3). Eventually, speakers of English (mostly as a SL) from all around the planet granted the language its current “global status” (Crystal, 2003: 3). In Crystal's (2003) words:

“British political imperialism had sent English around the globe, during the nineteenth century, so that it was a language ‘on which the sun never sets’.<sup>6</sup> During the twentieth century, this world presence was maintained and promoted almost single-handedly through the economic supremacy of the new American superpower. Economics replaced politics as the chief driving force. And the language behind the US dollar was English” (p. 10).

Even though English is not the only global language today, it is quite clear that it is the one with more speakers and a more exponential growth in all human history. By the time Crystal

was writing his book (2003), he estimated that around 25% of the world population was competent in English, and that said figure was steadily growing. Such a situation has been triggered by the crescent, and already examined, procedure of globalisation, which has also led to an enormous corpus of World Englishes (WE), different types of English employed for intercultural exchanges amongst societies (Seidlhofer, 2005), which gave birth to other “New Englishes,” and the use of ELF “without the perspective of a fixed end point” (Hülmbauer *et al.*, 2013: 393). Nowadays, there are globally more L2 users of English than those who have it as an L1 (Crystal, 2003), and English is considered the global language and the *Lingua Franca* par excellence worldwide. This means that ESL users, especially those with different L1s, are who, on the one hand, have converted the language into a *lingua franca* by communicating mostly amongst them (Samarin, 1987: 371); and, on the other hand, these same speakers are continuously contributing to the evolution of the language “in the new contexts of transnational communication” (Canagarajah, 2007: 925).

The concept of ELF belongs to a widespread category of EIL, or WE, whose main aim is to collaboratively build a bridge of communication amongst L2 users, regardless of what could be considered mistakes from a native-speaker’s view, if these do not affect intelligibility (Mocanu, 2022). This is ELF, it focuses on degree of understanding and mutual collaboration between speakers (Seidlhofer, 2011).

However, the terms of EIL, WE, and ELF, sometimes used interchangeably (Jenkins, 2015: 53), have brought confusion when it comes to understanding the phenomenon. Thus, the need of classifying and segmenting the different kinds of speakers for further research emerged. An important, although controversial ad hoc model known as the “Three Concentric Circles,” which reflects the different types of English around the world according to countries and their historical relation to the language, is the one created by Kachru, will be exemplified in the following sub-section.

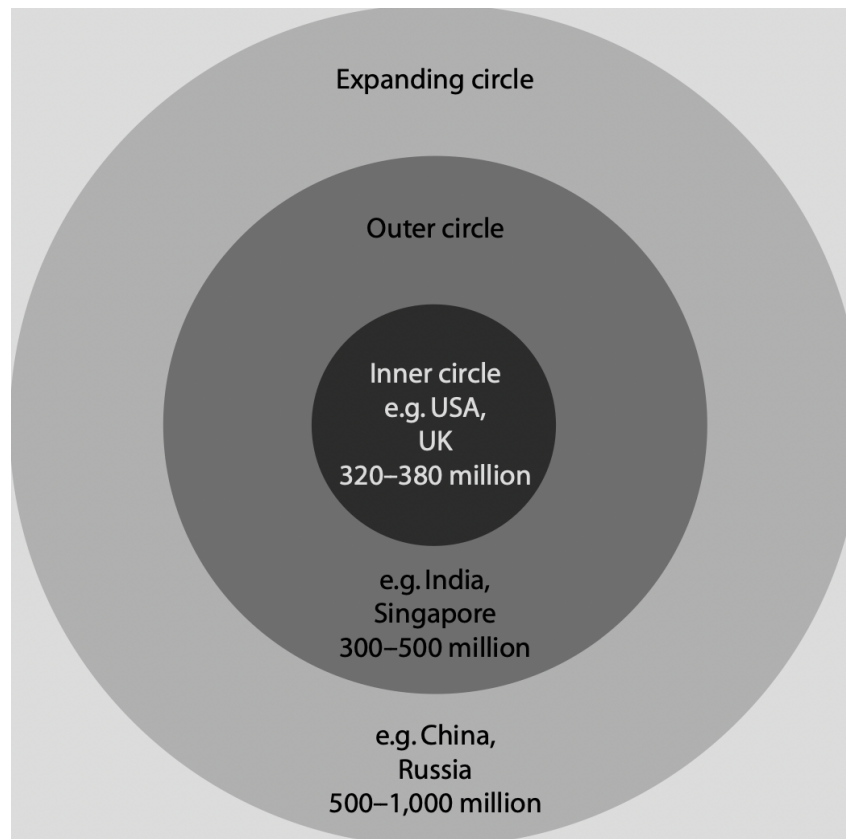
#### 1.1.1. Kachru’s Model of Concentric Circles.

The Three Concentric Circles model, elaborated by Braj Kachru in 1982, segments the different parts of the world in three “circles” depending on why and how its population are currently utilising English.

Beginning from the smallest category, the “Inner Circle” contains countries with the most “traditional bases of English” and “where it is the primary language,” such as the USA, the

UK, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Ireland. It is followed by “Outer Circle” which encompasses “the earlier phases of the spread of English in non-native” territories where it possesses a significant role in a multilingual environment as a second language (SL) for its users (Malawi, India, etc.). Finally, the “Expanding Circle” involves every nation that acknowledges EIL (Crystal, 2003: 60).

**Figure 1 - Kachru's Model of Concentric Circles (1985)**



*Note.* Extracted from Crystal (2003: 61).

According to Bruthiaux (2003), the model presented above is an adequate system to study ELF and describe EIL at a basic level, without any further “complex sociolinguistic phenomena” (p. 172). However, “it is important to note that ELF approaches reject sharp distinctions between different kinds of English users such as native speakers or foreign language users, with speakers blurring and even crossing over between categories in intercultural communication” (Baker, 2009: 570). This is one of the reasons why this system is controversial. As Seidlhofer (2011) explains, the terminology employed when referring to the speakers of a language is extremely significant, since some terms may carry negative connotations, such as “non-native speaker,” creating a hierarchy and triggering the idea that they are below “native speakers.”

## 1.2. Identity and ELF

Whilst language is a dynamic “system of sound-meaning connections” (Hauser *et al.*, 2002: 1571) which unites individuals into linguistic communities (Anderson, 1991), identity is a dynamic entity that these subjects decide to depict of themselves to society (Llurda *et al.*, 2016), and that motivates them towards any action line (Foote, 1951). It is being constantly modified throughout their life on account of their everyday experiences (Advance Consulting for Education, 2019).

However, contrary to how identity was described in previous research (e.g. Burke *et al.*, 1991), people do not only possess one identity, but multiple of them (Smith, 1992). They engage and switch from one to another depending on the social and linguistic environment that they find themselves in. According to Meyer (2009), the different types of identity that humans possess are: 1) the psychological, which is how people mentally perceive themselves; 2) the individual, the essence which the person believes that they have and truly states who they are; 3) the social, the image that people display for the rest; 4) collective, the sense of belonging to a certain group, and 5) cultural:

“the whole sum of characteristics given by place, gender, age, race, history, nationality, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, religious orientation, ethnicity and above all the gaps (blanks) between all these, allowing people to be part of one and another at the same time” (Meyer, 2009: 46).

The manners in which these identities are reflected through language, especially through ELF, are complex interactions which are studied within the fields of psychology, anthropology (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004: 369), and applied linguistics (as in this project). ESL subjects are capable of showing their background stories, their nationality (Mocanu, 2022), and their culture only by speaking English (Norton, 2010). This one link joining language and culture is so relevant, that ELF researchers have called it phenomenon, “linguaculture” (Pölz, 2005), whose study is one of the most relevant parts for this thesis.

At the time in which the ESL user is constantly displaying their linguaculture within a group of people, this same user starts developing an essential skill known as Intercultural Competence (IC) (Byram *et al.*, 2001), and the mentioned group become the user’s community of practice (Wenger, 1999), since they “share experience over time and a commitment to shared understanding” (Eckert, 2006: 110) that will enable them to establish a common and comfortable convention for every member (Lewis, 1969). This is a life-long process that entails an efficient interaction among a community of practice with “divergent affective, cognitive,

and behavioural orientations to the world” (Bok, 2009). However, for the ELF speaker to experience it, it has been proven (e.g., Savicki, 2008), that the subject in question must have appropriate preliminary international experience, such as working or studying abroad.

### 1.3. Identity Changes in SA Students

SA programmes are pre-established projects which consist of students travelling and staying abroad with academic purposes for a limited period of time (Kinging, 2009). This last statement declaring that it is a transient *époque* also serves to differentiate SA from migration “(temporary vs. permanent),” and from tourism “(education vs. leisure)” (Benson *et al.*, 2013: 34).

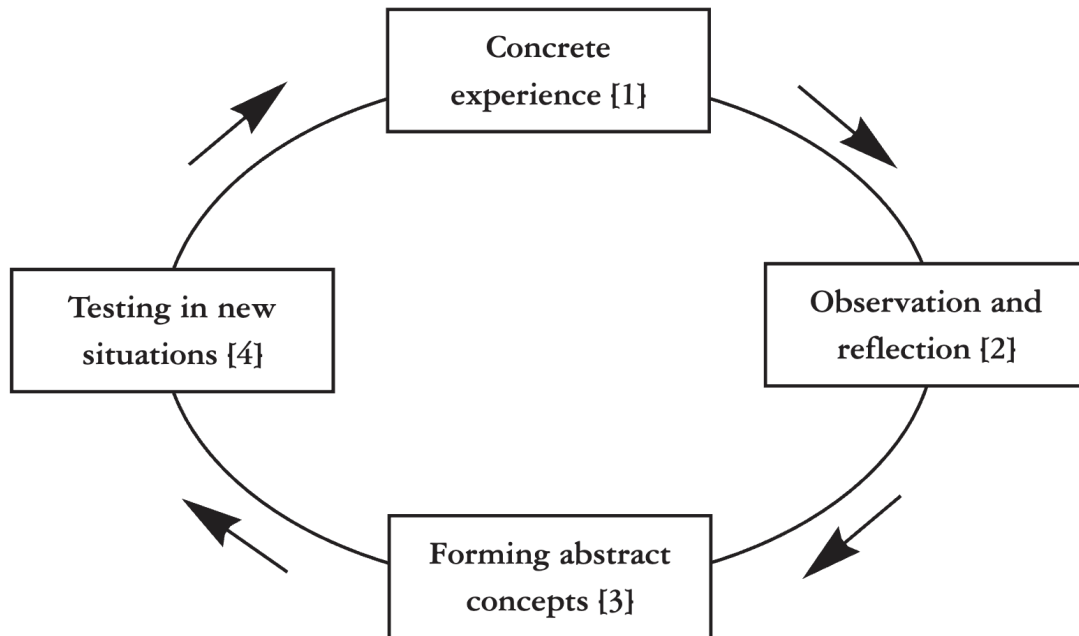
In the context of the European Union (EU), the Erasmus mobility programme was implanted in the decade of the 1980’s in order to promote two of the main principles of the EU: cooperation and European integration (European Union, 2016). These values have become of great concern since Brexit fuelled the current of Euroscepticism, a complex phenomenon that causes the augmentation of national identities while decreasing a sense of belonging and trust to the EU (De Vries, 2018). This opened a wound in the form of a Eurosceptic political crisis (Rowinski, 2021) which, in an effort to suture, the EU is trying to boost again a common European identity strong enough for the youth to fortify the “European *demos*” (Ambrosi, 2013: 143). This is one of the reasons why there has been an increase of promotion for SA programmes to the extent that the European Commission official website has dedicated a whole section encouraging the young to SA (European Commission, n.d.).

Behind the EU actions in response to the Eurosceptic political crisis trying to enhance European identity-construction through mobility programmes, such as Erasmus+, there lies constructivism. It is a theory that, within the context of politics and international relations, argues that “collective identities” are mouldable (Mitchell, 2012) by other actors throughout social interactions (Wendt, 1992). In other words, discourse, in this case, ELF, is extremely important, for it influences the way in which the world, or, under these circumstances, the EU, is perceived (Finnemore *et al.*, 1998). An essential element in constructivism is identity-construction. It can occur, with the essential help of international regimes (Checkel, 1998), throughout the use of religion, nationality, or collective identities, as mentioned before (Hopf, 1998). One of the most famous manners that the EU holds for fueling collective identities is, undoubtedly, the Erasmus+ mobility programme.

The Erasmus+ mobility programme provides students with the opportunity to SA whilst having the chance to travel, make new acquaintances, learn about another culture, and practice ELF while evolving their personality and adding a sense of “Europeanness” to it (King *et al.*, 2003), as proven with studies such as King *et al.* (2003), in which almost 60% of the participants claimed “an increase in their awareness of belonging to a ‘European cultural space’” (p. 240); García-Murias *et al.* (2016), which demonstrated a positive evolution of SA students’ identities towards the EU; or Mitchell (2012), in which SA students showed a deeper bond to Europe, even though their mottos for SA were not consciously related to the EU principles. From these statements, it is clear that SA students experience identity changes from the moment in which their sojourn begins, until their return. It is these changes that SA students undergo that this project is willing to uncover.

When a student is SA in a country with a different L1, their language learning process is different than when they are in their home country. One of the frames that I believe reflects it the best is the “simple description of the learning cycle,” (Kolb, 1974) . As shown in Figure 3, beginning from the top and advancing to the right, the person first comes across a concrete experience. Then, they stare at it whilst processing all the information and trying to connect all the linguacultural context. It follows that the brain forms abstract concepts about it. Finally, having understood that information, the student must test what they learned in other different and new situations. Since this is a cycle, this process is occurring once and once again, which renders the learning process much easier and faster. Taking into account that, according to linguists, like Llorca (2015) or Crystal (2003), the highest number of English users today worldwide belong to ESL speakers, meaning that, at the same time that they are learning, they are also the ones that will most likely develop it whilst reflecting some of their identity through it. This project focuses on the role that ELF plays in identity-construction processes among SA students, who are usually forced to use ELF on a daily basis , as well as on how it may change from the beginning to the end of the sojourn by adapting to a new context in which they must live using ELF, thus, developing their IC competence alongside their identities.



**Figure 2** - David Kolb's experiential learning cycle (1974)

*Note.* Extracted from Montrose (2002).

## 2. Methodology

In this chapter, the methodology of the project is presented. First, the study objectives, the thematic analysis research framework, and the research design utilised are examined. Within the latter, the location, participants and procedure used for obtaining the data are explained.

### 2.1. Study Objectives

The main objective of this dissertation is to examine how identity and ELF are projected by SA students at a Danish university. In particular, this study aims at answering the following research questions:

**What is the actual role of English as a Lingua Franca in identity-construction processes among Study Abroad students?**

**Does the role that ELF play in identification processes during SA suffer any changes from the beginning to the end of the sojourn?**

## 2.2. Research Framework: Thematic Analysis

The research framework employed in this study is of a qualitative nature: thematic analysis. This is mostly useful when examining complex, and non-numerical data sets, because it arranges them into different themes for an easier and more straightforward analysis (Dawadi, 2020). It is especially effective in seeking empirical results (Peel, 2020), which is the main aim of this project.

Several steps have been followed in accordance with the method. Firstly, the interviews have been manually transcribed. Then, several readings were performed in order to establish different themes, which were annotated on an Excel spreadsheet. Finally, recurrent and/or relevant themes were elicited from the initial codes.

## 2.3. Research Design

This sub-section aims to clarify key information about the interviews. Concretely, it reports on the location where the data were collected, the demographic information of the participants, the research instrument used for gathering the data, and the procedure.

### 2.3.1. Location

The interviews were conducted at Aarhus University, in Denmark, one of the most modern universities in Europe. Founded in 1928, it is “Denmark’s largest research-based university” [with three campuses (in Aarhus, Herning and Emdrup)], and it is today within the 100 top ranked universities worldwide.<sup>1</sup> With more than 50 programmes in English, Aarhus University international students represent 12% of its total student population (Aarhus University, 2021), which makes this institution a great location to collect primary data for this project.

The environment for each interview was different. Even though both were conducted in the same city, one of them was realised face-to-face in a university residence, and the other online, via the Zoom platform.

### 2.3.2. Participants

The primary data collected for the present project originates from two international female students who were studying at AU during the academic year 2021-2022. For reasons of privacy, their names were anonymised and changed to “Jennifer,” and “Anna.” The first participant was

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.study.eu/university/aarhus-university>. Accessed March 4, 2023.

21, and the second, 25 years old at the time of the interviews. Jennifer is from Japan, she was studying a degree in Humanities and had been in Aarhus since August 2021. On the other hand, Anna is from Italy, she was a student in a Humanities and Communication Degree, and had been in the city since January 2022.

### 2.3.3. Procedure

The research instrument employed for this study was a semi-structured interview (see Appendix 2) which contained sixteen questions: the first four were aimed at first contact with the interviewees and their thoughts about the impact of mobility programmes, and the following questions were related to their experience as international students and the role of ELF in their sojourn in Aarhus. The participants were interviewed individually by the researcher (an Erasmus student, too), after a non-disclosure agreement was signed. The interviews were recorded with a phone recorder, and they were manually transcribed, reviewed, and analysed. Finally, the most frequent themes were collected with the Voyant online program which eased the process of codifying data into a mindmap and a codebook on an Excel spreadsheet.

### 3. Results

This chapter gathers the results of the study. First, the ELF employed in the participants' discourse is analysed; secondly, it focuses on the role that ELF plays when reflecting the students' identities; and thirdly, it concentrates on ELF and the students' identity evolution throughout their SA experience.

#### 3.1. ELF in the participants' discourse

To start with, a glance at the characteristics of the type of English that the students employed in the interview would enable the reader to understand their linguistic profile. The following are what I believe to be ELF features in their discourses:

As shown in excerpts 1 and 2, Anna and Jennifer committed, what would be considered from an L1 English perspective, several grammar and vocabulary mistakes, such as with the third singular person of verbs, saying "have," instead of "has;" omitting the subjects of the sentences, etc. Both participants are conscious of this, but it does not preoccupy them, since it does not affect their intelligibility.

##### **Excerpt 1: Anna's interview**

Anna- "(...) We don't even really, really try to like better our **spelling**. I'm like, okay, I mean, we get each other anyway, you know, **doesn't really matter** (...)"

##### **Excerpt 2: Jennifer's interview**

Jennifer- "(...) Or I think I'm **more funny** when I'm speaking in Japanese, because it's just easier. (...)"

Both participants tend to make long pauses, whilst using fillers, such as: "um...". Such pauses are not related to the discourse speech, but with them trying to remember certain words, or expressions in English before continuing to talk, as demonstrated in the two following excerpts. The difference between them is that, since Anna is from a Mediterranean country, she tends to make this with a type of noise louder than Jennifer, showing each also a part of their cultural identity through ELF.

##### **Excerpt 3: Anna's interview**

Anna- "(...) **Um**, well, I think it's great. **I mean**, (...)"

**Excerpt 4: Jennifer's interview**

Jennifer- "(...) **But, um...** for Danish people, I'm not saying they're not open, but they already have friends in class, they know each other... **And** it's hard for me to just go in the group and talk to them. I feel like I'm disturbing the conversation or **something like that**. (...)"

When they are not able to elicit a given term, they rely on two alternatives. One of them is the use of general concepts and vague words such as "stuff," "like," "you know," etc. expecting the other person to contribute to their understanding of what they want to express. And the other is simply stopping whatever that they are trying to say to begin again with nexus like "so," "or," "and," or "but". This can be appreciated in the following excerpts, one from each interview; and in Figures 4 and 5, the word clouds exhibit the most frequent words of each of the subjects.

**Excerpt 5: Anna's interview**

Anna- "(...) I think that my English in general, **you know**, I watch a lot of American **stuff**. **So** I use a lot of American words **and stuff**. I think I have **like** an American influence, also my boyfriend is American **so...** that influence."

**Excerpt 6: Jennifer's interview**

Jennifer- "(...) **But, um...** it's kind of hard for me to understand. **Like completely, totally. Maybe like**, when I hang out with my Danish dorm mates, they sometimes use Danish, and I don't understand. So, it's not **like** I'm feeling left behind, or, **yeah, it's fine. But um**, it would be nice if I can I understand, **of course, yeah**. (...)"

**Figure 3** - *Word cloud with Jennifer's most frequent morphemes*



### 3.2. The Role of ELF in SA Students' Identity

Both participants reflected several traits of their personality and culture whilst employing ELF when communicating. Even though their accents were not really strong, Jennifer's tone was much more relaxed, soothing and plain; while Anna's was the complete opposite. I found this quite important, because it shows part of their nationality, a contrast between both cultures: the outgoing personality of someone from a Mediterranean State, and the calm one from an Asian person.

Finally, in relation to the latter, I could also notice in each of the participants a different way of answering the questions. As shown in excerpt 7, Jennifer talked more slowly, less, and with longer sentences and pauses to thoroughly think about what she was going to say next, as shown in the first following excerpt, whilst Anna seemed to answer faster, and more spontaneously due to the outgoing personality related with her Mediterranean culture, which is why she uses really short sentences with almost no nexus between them, and there are so many commas in her written version of the interview, as it can be appreciated in excerpt 8. Because she is giving herself much less time than Jennifer to rethink everything before speaking, as appreciated in the second extract.

#### **Excerpt 7: Jennifer's interview**

Jennifer- "Well, "spoken..." **So, I think** I started learning English when I was 11 years old. **But** it was only school English. **So** I couldn't really speak. **Then** I went to Australia for one year for an exchange when I was in high school. I think when I was 17 years old. That's the first time I started to speak in English, kind of officially. **So... how long? For about three or five years...? No, four years.**"

#### **Excerpt 8: Anna's interview**

Anna- "Danish people I wouldn't know, honestly, because I don't speak to them. And when I speak to them I don't really notice, nothing weird in their accent, you know? Well, Italian people I think it depends. Because you have some people who have like a very good English, but it's very difficult. This is actually a question that I always have in my boyfriend. I'm like, because when we first started talking, I thought that my accent was good, honestly. And he was like, 'oh, no, no, you have a very thick Southern accent.' (...)"

### 3.3. ELF and Identity Changes during the Sojourn

Throughout both interviews, the subjects reflected identity changes from when they first began their mobility programmes, and expected even more of them for when their sojourns would

conclude. Both Jennifer, who had been in Aarhus for more than half a year, and Anna, who has been in Aarhus for...., remarked that it was an experience with a positive impact

Linguistically, Jennifer believes that her English level has definitely improved because she feels that her speech has become more fluent, along with the rest of her communication skills. She also seems extremely conscious of the way that she expresses herself, that she understands what she is being told, and that she is also understood. This type of awareness when she communicates seems to be helping her develop her IC skills. While Anna does not have much hope of her English skills getting better, she is learning words from other languages that her international friends speak (see excerpt 9), so, with such a diversity of cultures, she is developing more and more her IC, too (of which she is aware, as reflected in the interview). In relation to social relationships and their effects on the SA students, it is relevant to remark that they both claimed to have mostly socialised with international people because of the difficulty to connect with Danes. The reasons mentioned were, first, the local language, which they do not know and from which Danes would sometimes not switch to English so that to speak with them.

**Excerpt 9: Anna's interview**

Anna - "Well, you know what? English aside, I'm trying to learn some words from other languages, as well. Like, one of my friends, she is from Czech Republic. So, she's like, 'hey! Teach me a little bit of Italian, and I teach you a little bit of Czech.' I'm like, 'sure, let's do that!' (...)"

Secondly, they allude to the fact that local students already have their local friends, so they feel that they will be bothering them if they approach them. And also, as stated in excerpts 10 and 11, Jennifer and Anna felt more at ease with international students, since they were in the same situation and were used to the practice of ELF to communicate amongst them. Additionally, they declared that, even though they were mostly in contact with international students from L2 English speaking countries whose L1 is also different from their own, they are acquiring more communicative skills as ELF users because of the continuity with which they are practising the language (although Anna believed that these changes are barely noticeable for her, and they sometimes doubt when appreciating them on themselves) at the same time that they are building strong relationships, an essential point for the evolvement of IC. This is connected to Kolb's (1974) experiential learning cycle in that, first, the participants were exposed to a new concrete experience, which was socialising with a certain group of international students whose L1 was not English; second, they consciously observed their



behaviour and tried to reflect back; third, their brains attempted to construct a comprehensive, generic model whilst connecting all linguacultural links amongst the speakers present within the conversation; and, finally, the participants ventured into applying this new information to other contexts (place, topics, etc.), further developing their IC. This keeps being a constant cycle that increasingly makes the learning process easier because of the continuous practice and the strengthening bonds that they are forming with the international students that they learn with.

**Excerpt 10: Anna's interview**

Carla Victoria- "Do you socialise with local people, Erasmus people or people from your own country?, and why?"

Anna- "Erasmus people. Italian people, honestly, I try to stay away from Southern people as much as I can. That sounds wrong, but it's mostly because I don't want to speak Italian. (...) I think it's very, very hard to socialise with Danish people. But honestly, I don't really, I don't really mind. I, I like the fact that I'm socialising with him (...)"

**Excerpt 11: Jennifer's interview**

Jennifer- "(...) I would say the most I interact with are internationals. Because it's easy for me to meet internationals at class, or at my dorm. (...) It's a bit difficult for me to, I don't know, get close, closer with Danish people at class or...? Yeah..."

Both Anna and Jennifer stated that they are not meticulous about grammar when speaking English (although Jennifer, as mentioned, seems to be more careful about it), because they mostly practice ELF with other ESL users, not L1 individuals. Therefore, because they are in the same situation, they work jointly to build meaning in English, whilst reflecting their cultural background, that everyone within the conversation can understand through the already mentioned Kolb's (1974) experiential learning cycle. In order to achieve understanding, they use colloquial English and sometimes mix it with their L1s, as shown in excerpts 12 and 13.

**Excerpt 12: Anna's interview**

Anna- "(...) One of my closest friends here is actually a girl that is in our course, as well, María. She speaks Spanish, and I speak Italian. Sometimes we don't know how to say words in English, so we just say them in our first language. We don't even really, really try to like better our spelling pronunciation/vocabulary. I'm like, okay, I mean, we get each other anyway, you know, doesn't really matter. (...)"

**Excerpt 13: Anna's interview**

“(…) Oh, I'm extremely grateful that I know how to speak English like properly, well, not properly. But I have a C1 level in English, and I think that if you have less than that, I think it's going to be very difficult, especially in a university, and all the stuff that you have to do for your university. So, if I had, like, if someone's gonna ask me, Should I go to Denmark to have my Erasmus experience? Yes, well make sure you know, English, you know, even if your grammar is not perfect, but like, just make sure you have at least a C1 level (…)”

Jennifer and Anna insisted on the relevance of English throughout their sojourn stating that it would not have been possible for them to SA if they did not have the English knowledge enough to follow university classes or carry out their everyday life in another country, as exhibited in excerpt. They declare having encountered several difficulties, such as the local language and culture, that they could not have overcome if not for ELF. This is because, even though both participants stated their previous intentions of learning Danish, they declared that it was too difficult to be taught for only practising it during one year. Since it is not a globally spread language, they state that the effort would not have been worth it.

**Excerpt 14: Jennifer's interview**

Carla Victoria- “(…) what has the role of English been during your Erasmus stay?”

Jennifer- “Well, in my daily life with my friends, simply just having a conversation, or asking something to someone. Here, everyone can speak English, so I can just speak to them and ask about anything. So, I think, like, because I can understand and speak English, I don't really have difficulties to live here. Also, for my education. I only use English, of course. I couldn't understand the classes, or what teachers talk about if I didn't understand English, that would be horrible. (…)”

**Excerpt 15: Jennifer's interview**

Jennifer- “(…) I'm staying for one year, and maybe it's gonna be fun to learn Danish. But then I thought, ‘Danish is just too difficult.’ For conversation is, like, impossible for me. And also, I thought, ‘I'm not going to use it after I go back to Japan.’ So, it's not worth it, I guess (…)”

Professionally, they both realised and insisted on (especially Jennifer) the significance, of the SA experience which involved using ELF day by day, for their future professional careers. As shown in excerpts 16 and 17, they stated that, because of how they have developed their English, and how they can reflect on their Curriculum Vitae, they are capable of living for several months in another country (showing their adaptation skills) and they would have a wider range of possibilities at their disposal in a far larger and more global employment market.

**Excerpt 16: Anna's interview**

Anna- "(...) I think it's gonna help me in my curriculum, in my resumé. I'll have my Erasmus experience, a part of my life being six months abroad in Denmark. I think that's something that people are gonna appreciate (...)"

**Excerpt 17: Jennifer's interview**

Jennifer- "(...) my English has improved and that would be very, very useful for my job in the future, the improvement in my English has broaden my options for my future jobs (...)"

On another note, concretely dealing with AU as their SA institution of choice, the participants stated that this was not their first SA option; only Anna commented that she had this institution among her first options when filling out the paperwork for the SA application because she was not offered Sweden instead. As displayed in the following two quotations from the interviews, the most relevant reasons as to why they placed AU amongst their alternatives mainly include the personal and linguistic benefits that they believed were going to obtain from this experience, and that, as previously mentioned, they confirmed were developing at the time of the interview

**Excerpt 18: Anna's interview**

Anna- "(...) I think it's gonna help me in my curriculum, in my resumé. I'll have my Erasmus experience, a part of my life being six months abroad in Denmark. I think that's something that people are gonna appreciate (...)"

**Excerpt 19: Jennifer's interview**

Jennifer- "(...) my English has improved and that would be very very useful for my job in the future, the improvement in my English has broaden my options for my future jobs (...)"

This SA experience has also offered them the opportunity to get to know in depth another absolute different country with a government and politics unlike the ones that they are used to, so they were asked questions about their preferences to explore up to which point their national identity had developed. As manifested in the following two passages, they both compared the Danish education system to the one in their home country. They coincided that they preferred the one in Denmark, since they practice ELF with their teachers whilst speaking throughout the whole class in English, not in their L1, or switching from it to English; classes are more interactive, hence encouraging the use of ELF; and the focus is on practising academic English

with different exercises (debates, essays, etc.), not just grammar, which, according to the subjects, is useless.

**Excerpt 20: Anna's interview**

Anna- "(...) I really like the way they teach here. It seemed very interactive, not like in Italy, at all. In Italy you've got the professor teach something for like two or more hours, and that's it. You know, you can't really talk and if you're like lucky, you can ask questions. Otherwise, sometimes they're even like, 'no, we've got no time for questions.' But here they actually want to listen to your opinion, which is nice (...)"

**Excerpt 21: Jennifer's interview**

Jennifer- "(...) In Japan, I learned English in Japanese, if you know what I mean. Also, it was more about reading and writing, rather than speaking and listening. Here, literally every single person I meet can speak English so fluently. I think that's because we had a different education. They (Danes) speak more in school, I guess, they watch English contents more, or they simply have more chances to use English here in Denmark. I think so. Yeah, I think it's very different (...)"

They also stated that, even though both of them are open-minded, their limits were broadened even more as another effect of the SA experience. This has helped them not to be too attached to their countries and appreciate international cultures. Although, as denoted in excerpts 22 and 23, both of them claim at some point in their interviews that sometimes they miss their countries, or talking in their L1s.

**Excerpt 22: Anna's interview**

"(...) now I speak in English every day, which is weird, and I'm gonna miss this. I mean, I speak English with my boyfriend, but you know, here it's different because it's very funny to hear all the other accents. Because everybody has a different accent when they speak English, you know, like, I'm Italian, but I have a different accent from like, another Italian guy that lives in my same hallway, his accent is very thick. You can hear by the accent that he is Italian. So, yeah, I think it's very funny. I'm gonna miss it (...)"

**Excerpt 23: Jennifer's interview**

Carla Victoria- "What are the languages that you commonly use? And in which context?"

"Um... here, of course, English, because I hang out with international students or Danish people mostly, so I use English. And... 'in which context?' From daily conversations, to in class. But when I sometimes hang out with Japanese people here, I speak Japanese. I sometimes miss speaking Japanese, so I also like it (...)"

Nevertheless, they do in fact keep an open mind and show that their national identity and the comparison of the education systems do not seem as strong as when they began their sojourns, even though none of the participants seem to be fond of Danes, as shown in excerpts 10 and 11. Anna and Jennifer, declare that they prefer the personality of international people, although their accents can sometimes be difficult for Jennifer to understand because of their quick way of speaking with phonemes that she is not used to, such as the Spanish (r).

## 4. Final Remarks

This research project aimed to scrutinise the concept of ELF whilst situating it in a SA context, where, as stated by Finnemore *et al.* (1998), it is a crucial element for the development of SA students' identities.

Both participants in the study kept being open-minded for learning and evolving throughout their sojourn, and they also possessed previous international experience, as Savicki (2008) considers necessary for IC evolution. In the case of Jennifer, this was because she had previously gone to Australia in order to improve her English skills; and in the case of Anna, because of her American boyfriend, whom she is used to interact in English. As expected by studies such as King *et al.* (2003), García-Murias *et al.* (2016), or Mitchell (2012), even though none of the participants mentioned that their motto for SA was for the integration values of the EU, or a will to develop their identities, they showed a development towards a more European identity, but without forgetting or neglecting their national one, as demonstrated when they had stated that they sometimes missed talking in their L1. The only aspect which they seemed to disregard was, in both cases, the educational system, declaring that, because of the lack of use of ELF in their home countries classes, they felt as if they were not really learning English until they arrived to AU, owing to a more modernised and practical, not so theoretical, educational model in which English is the vehicular language. This is a conclusion that was not expected to attain from this study, since it only aimed at answering the questions about ELF and its influence in SA. But it is also something to which this study can contribute, more concretely, the methodology employed in some countries, or institutions, for English Language Teaching (ELT). Although, there would be more research work needed, from the results of this project, it is encouraged a more practical perspective for ELT, similar to the one in the Danish educational system, in which the use of ELF is essential and students learn, applying the David Kolb's experiential learning cycle (1974) to make them develop their IC at the same time, whilst practising it within the classroom.

Another interesting, and unforeseen finding from this study is that, even though the two subjects seemed to have positively changed their attitudes towards Europe, they also seemed to disregard learning Danish and socialising with Danes, stating that the language was too difficult and useless for them in the future [remarking the relevance of that "special role" (Crystal, 2003: 3) that English has and that has made it the global *Lingua Franca* for them to

have found it useful enough to learn it], since it was unlikely that they were going to speak it again; and declaring that the general Danes' personality traits were that they are too cold, close and hard to approach, compelling them to mostly socialise with international students, not really immersing themselves into the whole experience that the European Commission declares that the Erasmus+ mobility programme is about (n.d.).

However, both participants highlighted the relevance of a SA experience, they believe that it marks a difference on the *Curriculum Vitae* because it shows their adaptation skills, their ability to live, socialise and acquire knowledge about an environment different from their home countries' employing ESL, or another L2. These are, according to the subjects, the most important aspects that they have gained during their sojourn, apart from the international friends that they have made all throughout their SA experience.

In conclusion, not only does ELF play an extremely relevant role in identity-construction processes among SA students, up to the point that the European Union, based on the constructivist theory, is promoting SA programmes to strengthen the European identity (European Commission, n.d.). But it is also an essential feature of ESL users in the identity-reflection process that they learn by opening the door that allows speakers to access their linguacultural link (Pözl, 2005), and then, employ it to better their IC skills [through David Kolb's experiential learning cycle (1974)] whilst manifesting little by little their own identity and personality evolving into a more confident self with a higher self-esteem, answering the second research question for this study. Yes, the role that ELF plays in identity-construction processes during SA does in fact change from the beginning to the end of the sojourn.

The most relevant challenges experienced during the composition of this dissertation were in relation to the participants, out of six students who were contacted and that confirmed their engagement with this study, only two, Jennifer and Anna, ultimately joined the project. During the 2021-2022 academic course, when the interviews were realised, there were still some stern Covid-19 preventive Danish laws in effect, such as the obligation of being in lockdown if infected until getting a negative antigen or PCR test. This made another obstacle emerge in relation to the setting for the interviews, and the interviewees, like Anna, who got infected by Covid-19. One of the interviewees cancelled, and, after numerous attempts by Anna trying to get a negative test, it was finally decided that her interview was going to be conducted online via the Zoom platform when, even though she was still positive, she was only experiencing mild symptoms that did not impede her from performing a normal life, or going

to university if it were possible for her by law. Another complication which surfaced was the wide range of subjects with English as the vehicular language, and different timetables available for international students at AU. This decelerated the process of the interviews, because, after several tries of scheduling a suitable date and time for both, the researcher and the interviewees, some of the latter would cease pursuing and finish rejecting participating in the study. Finally, related to the last difficulty mentioned, there is another adversity, not only for this project, but for future SA students in Denmark, a political agreement amongst most Danish parties that was signed on June 25, 2021 with the objective to decrease international students in the country. In Denmark, there is a “state educational grant and loan scheme (SU and SU- lån)” (Uddannelses- og Forskningsstyrelsen, n.d.) for most full-time students that has become a concern for the Danish Government “over the growing number from the European Union and European Economic Area (EEA) countries supporting their studies with Danish student grants (SU)” (Myklebust, 2021). Because of this, Denmark is cutting the number of English subjects at universities so as to promote the Danish language and reduce the amount of international students for the economic reasons previously noted. This process began in the 2021-2022 academic course, inducing the number of international students at AU.

This project was limited by the duration of the 1-year Erasmus+ program, so further possible research within this subject would be a thorough project about identity changes that SA students, or workers, endure when spending two or more years in another country. This would also allow to augment the sample of participants, since there would be more time to prepare it and analyse the data. Other possible future projects are, an identity-construction study with volunteer teachers in third-world countries and their influence on the students’ identities; and two comparative studies, one of them would be about two non-L1 English students groups, one belonging in the EU, and the other being from another continent, and the other study would be about two non-L1 English students groups within the EU, but one of them with students with a certain degree of disability. It would be especially interesting to study if they would learn any different in SA.



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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Confidentiality Agreement



**This interview has been developed by Carla Victoria Morato Casillas for a final degree project to complete the English Studies degree at the University of Salamanca, and it is been supervised by Vasilica Mocanu-Florea.**

**The participant \_\_\_\_\_, with ID**

**\_\_\_\_\_ accepts to be interviewed and become a participant in this final degree project about identity and the use of English as a Lingua Franca in a study abroad context. The interview data will be analysed, treated as confidential, and anonymised to be used solely for the purpose of research.**

**Signature**

**Date**

Please, fill in this chart with your personal information in CAPITAL LETTERS.

<b>Name and surname</b>	
<b>E-mail address</b>	
<b>Telephone number</b>	
<b>Place of birth</b>	
<b>Date of birth</b>	
<b>Home Residence</b>	
<b>Studies</b>	
<b>Beginning of the stay in Aarhus (Denmark)</b>	

<b>End of the stay in Aarhus (Denmark)</b>	

Your contribution is key for the development of this project concerned with identity, and the use of English as a Lingua Franca whilst studying abroad. If you are further interested in this work, contact the researcher and author, Carla Victoria Morato Casillas ([cvmoratoc@usal.es](mailto:cvmoratoc@usal.es)). Thank you very much for your cooperation! ☺

## Appendix 2. Guiding Interview Questions

1. What's your name and where are you from?
2. Which were the reasons that determined you to enrol in a mobility program, and why in Aarhus?
3. In which ways do you think this mobility programme will influence your life?
  - Personally
  - Linguistically
  - Professionally
4. How would you define yourself?
5. How long have you spoken English for? Have you noticed any difference in relation to how you learned English in your home country, and now? In relation to the latter, how do you feel about the way that you are learning/improving it now?
6. Do you socialise more with local/Erasmus/people from your own country? Why?
7. What are the languages that you commonly use and in which context? Are you learning the local language? If so, why?
8. Has the local language caused any difficulties for you during your stay?

9. Has it been difficult for you to socialise with local people? If so, do you think it has something to do with the language?
10. How is English helping you during your stay in Denmark?
11. Did you notice any particular features in the accent of the local/the international people that you get more along with? If so, which ones?
12. Do you think that your English has been influenced by any particular feature of any accent?
13. Taking into account your experience as an international student, what do you believe is the role of English in the educational, and employment world? What about as a medium of communication?
14. What has been the role of English in your Erasmus stay?
15. What sort of English have you used in your Erasmus stay? Could you describe its features? Does it resemble a native sort of English, or is it different?
16. Would you say your level of English has/will improve due to your Erasmus stay? In which aspects (grammar, syntax, vocabulary, communicative competence, more related to self-confidence)?