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## **Global Language Variation in Online Writing Instructional Spaces: English as a Lingua Franca Among Global Participants in a Massive Open Online Course**

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GLOBAL LANGUAGE VARIATION IN ONLINE WRITING INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES:  
ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA AMONG GLOBAL PARTICIPANTS IN A MASSIVE  
OPEN ONLINE COURSE

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## ABSTRACT

### GLOBAL LANGUAGE VARIATION IN ONLINE WRITING INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES: ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA AMONG GLOBAL PARTICIPANTS IN A MASSIVE OPEN ONLINE COURSE

Angela May Dadak  
Old Dominion University, 2020  
Director: Dr. Kevin Eric DePew

Two vectors of the internationalization of US higher education—online courses and student diversity—intersect at a point where a broad mix of culturally and linguistically diverse students enroll in online courses, including writing courses. This study applies an English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) lens to examine language in an online writing environment in order to understand how the participants use their linguistic resources to communicate in English across varieties and around the world. This study employs discourse analysis to two discussion forums from a US-based composition MOOC (Massive Open Online Course). More than three quarters of the MOOC participants came from outside of North America; almost half reported being native English speakers, and an equal amount reported speaking English enough for most situations. One discussion board centered on the concept of ethos and another centered on brainstorming ideas for the final writing project.

In examining how global English language users from a variety of linguistic backgrounds discuss writing in these spaces, this study found that participants expressed understanding and valuing of English language variation across time and geographic locations, and they demonstrated accommodation in use of culturally-laden language forms for the global audience through uses of idioms in the discussion posts. Throughout the forums, deviations from English as a native language (ENL) norms occurred, but in these forum spaces, the flow appears to

continue with attention on the communicative goal rather than on the non-ENL variations. These findings evidence strong potential for the inclusion of language awareness activities in US composition instruction spaces. Such work aims to create US university writing courses that are more equitable and effective for a global audience, including helping domestic US students develop important intercultural skills to participate in culturally and linguistically diverse arenas.

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Dedicated to Jeff and Xan

For everything

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## NOMENCLATURE

<i>cMOOC</i>	connectivist MOOC
<i>EFL</i>	English as a Foreign Language
<i>ELF</i>	English as a Lingua Franca
<i>ELFA</i>	English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings
<i>ENL</i>	English as a Native Language
<i>ESL</i>	English as a Second Language
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
<i>MICASE</i>	Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English
<i>MOOC</i>	Massive Open Online Course
<i>NES</i>	Native English Speaker
<i>NCTE</i>	National Council of Teachers of English
<i>NNES</i>	Non-Native English Speaker
<i>OSU</i>	The Ohio State University
<i>OWC</i>	Online Writing Courses
<i>OWI</i>	Online Writing Instruction
TESOL	Teaching/Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages
<i>VOICE</i>	Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English
<i>WrELFA</i>	Corpus of Written ELF in Academic Settings
xMOOX	extended MOOC

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## CHAPTER 1

### GRAPPLING WITH LANGUAGE: GLOBAL STUDENTS, ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA, AND U.S. COMPOSITION

#### **Introduction**

Offering online courses to global audiences—alongside other measures such as internationalizing domestic curricula, recruiting international students to US campuses, and opening branch campuses abroad—are a key part of higher education institutions' response to globalization (Kauppinen 544, Kim and Zhu 172). Along with the financial gains gleaned from enrolling more international students, motivations for these internationalization actions include gaining access to a larger pool of prospective students across the globe and preparing students to work with international teams (Altbach, Lewin, Marmolejo, Olcott 20). Two vectors of this internationalization of higher education—online courses and student diversity—intersect at a point where a broad mix of culturally and linguistically diverse students enroll in online courses.

To have US university writing courses that are equitable and effective for a global audience, including helping domestic US students develop important intercultural skills, those who create and teach courses should be prepared to handle issues of linguistic and cultural diversity in their classes. However, writing instructors, who rarely have training or experience in second language writing, often see written variations from a perceived English standard as a deficit, a lack of effort or intelligence on the part of the writer (Matsuda "Myth"). These assumptions can lead instructors to refuse to engage with student work, asking them to "fix the grammar, then I'll read your paper," which goes against pedagogically sound cycles of writing and revision that emphasize detailed proofreading and editing more in later stages. Even in less formal written discourse such as email messages and discussion posts, which have been shown to have elements of speech as well as writing, deviations from the standard are used as indications

of lack of fluency instead of as modulation of style and form for the rhetorical situation. In writing of all sorts, these variations can be indications of an effort of learning as writers take risks with new vocabulary and structures (Gass and Selinker); they can also show strategic use of the language for a global audience. However, if readers approach the language variations in these texts as deficits and refuse to make the effort to understand, they put linguistically diverse writers in a position where writing development is difficult to achieve. These attitudes harm not only the international students in the course, but also the domestic native-English-speaking students, for instead of cultivating the skills to be able to skillfully work with diverse teams—one of the National Council of Teachers of English’s explicitly stated 21st century skills—they reinforce nativist prejudices.

With that conflict of views toward language difference in mind, this project applies the English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) paradigm to discourse centered on writing. Over the last several decades, ELF has examined international speakers’ discourse to discover features of international language use and the strategies its users employ to maintain communication. Building on ELF insights, this project aims to illustrate and explain the global English variations used in a specific context in order to inform instructors so that they can make sound pedagogical decisions about treating those variations in their students’ work. By seeing typical ways that users vary English in writing instruction environments and understanding the strategies being employed even as those variations deviate visibly from native speaker forms, writing instructors can better understand their multilingual students and treat all language users in the course with informed equanimity.

This project will use data from discussion forums of a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on writing and rhetoric created and hosted by a US institution. More than three quarters

of the registrants for this MOOC enrolled from locations outside of the US, and the majority of the participants reported being not only fluent in English but also multilingual. This source has several advantages for this project. Communication throughout the MOOC will be among globally and linguistically diverse participants, and while to some degree it leans to native-speaking norms (for example, this MOOC is hosted by a US institution), in other ways it offers more space for language variation (for example, this type of MOOC features less instructor input and more participant-to-participant communication) to occur in ways that can show how participants work “to get it done” across language variation, a hallmark of global communication in English. The fact that the communication is taking place in an online environment is also useful in light of the rise of online writing instruction in composition.

Thus, in order to examine English language variations and their use in a writing instructional context, this project asks

- What features of English language variations (that some may consider errors) do participants use when discussing writing in an instructional space? How do participants respond to such variations?
- What accommodation and negotiation strategies do globally diverse English language users employ in their interactions in a writing education environment? How is miscommunication treated and/or resolved?
- What attitudes do participants demonstrate toward language change and variation in their interactions about writing?

### **English as a Global Language**

As a global language, English speakers in places such as the United States, Britain, Australia, and Canada are outnumbered by the number of English speakers in other parts of the



world, places where English may have originally been imported or imposed and now have their own nativized variety, such as Singaporean, Indian, and South African Englishes, and places where English serves a particular function in the country as a second language or language of international communication, such as China and much of Europe (Canagarajah, Matsuda and Matsuda, McArthur). This spread is not just geographical: English has become entrenched in particular domains as well, such as international business, tourism and travel, and academia (Crystal, Mauranen *Exploring*). As more communities adopt English, they mold the language to suit their needs, creating new words, pronunciations, expressions, idioms, etc.

Even as international communities adapt English to form distinct varieties to suit local expression and identity, the language needs to function at an intelligible level across the varieties, leading toward the idea that some kind of international English language standard exists, a variety that users can code switch into as needed. This standardization on an international scale would bypass so-called native varieties; it would not be a process of language users conforming to a British or American dialect but instead using forms of the language that is native to no one, forms in which local expressions such as idioms are reduced and accents are homogenized. However, research has shown that users do not all align to some single international variety, which linguists have indicated does not actually exist: “The concept of a single supranational standard to which both UK and US norms contribute has existed *rather vaguely* for some time” (McArthur 1); “labels preceding ‘English’ in the singular (‘global,’ ‘world’...) *perpetuate a myth*. They have *no sociolinguistic or functional validity*” (Kachru and Smith 6) (all emphases mine). That is to say, linguists studying global use of English have not found a single, international form of the language but rather have noted that interactants employ

strategies for communication across the varieties to accommodate each other and preserve (or reinstall) intelligibility.

### **English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)**

Instead of international English as a particular variety, the reality of global communication in English centers on communicative strategies used across English varieties. Known as *English as a Lingua Franca*, this approach to the global tongue has focused much of its research on interactions between non-native speakers of English, a focus developed to fill a gap between two mismatched ideas about the language, as highlighted by ELF pioneer Barbara Seidlhofer: (1) changes in ideas about English language pedagogy and the sociolinguistic position of English(es) worldwide, (2) and the relatively static idea of which English variety is the target of such teaching, which she argues is still native-speaker norms (“Closing” 135). That is to say, while understanding about the status and variations of English around the globe has grown, language teaching largely appears to be blind to these insights, holding to a conceptualized standard—usually British or American—as the goal for learners to attain. In response to this discord, ELF as a research movement examines corpora of interactions between fluent speakers of English whose mother tongue may not be English in order to understand features and variations that these English language users employ to successfully communicate (Erling 41-2).

**ELF Users versus EFL Learners** As alluded to above, ELF users are those, regardless of language background, use English to communicate with others who do not share the same language background. For example, at a linguistics conference in Finland with participants from Britain, Russia, Brazil and Morocco or at a meeting regarding an international science effort with participants from Japan, France, and the US, communication takes place in a shared language,

usually English, perhaps turning at times into Spanish or French, but returning to conduct much if not all business in English. In these situations, the participants have different proficiencies and use different varieties of English to get their work done, and they work together to adjust their speech across these differences, to avoid miscommunication, and to undertake repairs when communication stumbles. As Seidlhofer explains

In such situations, as happens all across the globe in millions of interactions every day, it is usually taken for granted that speakers will have a command of English that varies along a continuum from minimal to expert, but that they regard themselves as capable of accomplishing the task at hand. One could say that speakers have decided for themselves that they can meet the requirements of participation in a particular speech event. What then happens is that the participants gauge a level of language at which they can operate, and settle on *ad hoc, pro tem* norms that are adequate to the task and commensurate to the command of the linguistic resources they have in common. (Seidlhofer “Understanding” 18)

What is central to this observation is that the participants are not insisting on native speaker norms or calling other participants out for not being fluent in ways as a native speaker but rather they manipulate language to suit the context to get the task done.

In ELF, the focus is on using English to communicate, not on learning the language. This position can be contrasted with that of “English as a Foreign Language” (EFL) or “English as a Second Language” (ESL), which position the speaker as a student who is learning the language. The two roles—multilingual English user and English learner—share many characteristics related to language processing, to be sure: for example, memory plays much the same function in each, and the same language forms and variations can appear (Hynninen, 13; Mauranen *Exploring* 4). However, the identity and positioning of the two are distinct. As Jenkins explains,

“this is not to claim that ELF speakers are by definition proficient: some are still learners or have ceased learning before becoming proficient, in which case they will make errors. The crucial point is that there is a sociolinguistic distinction between EFL/ESL learners’ errors and the innovations of proficient ELF users, even though the two sometimes result in the same forms” (Jenkins “Accommodating” 928). The difference in positioning between EFL and ELF/ESL is evident from Jenkins’s use of *error* and *innovation*. Noting that the latter envisions students as lacking, their variations as issues of interference from their other languages or fossilization of something they had learned incorrectly, ELF scholars look at language in terms of *contact and evolution* (Jenkins “Accommodating” 928) in which variations can be useful—even strategic for comprehension and camaraderie—or, at the very least, can be ignored as communication continues to flow to accomplish the task at hand. The identities of being an English language user and an English language student need not be exclusive; a person can be both an ELF speaker and an EFL/ESL student, forefronting one identity or the other depending on the situation.

The distinction between EFL and ELF is important, particularly for the pedagogical reasons Seidlhofer references in her explanation of the exigence of ELF. While many—not only scholars—acknowledge the plurality of Englishes in the world, ELF teaching generally emphasizes an English as a native language (ENL) standard instead of globally-intelligible language skills. In this view, deviations from ENL, even those that are repeated in ways that facilitate communication or at least do not disrupt it, are considered errors and thus build toward a deficit view of language variation. Arguing for moving away from pedagogies that set a native English variety as the goal, Seidlhofer calls attention to the ways that understanding ELF can affect pedagogy for EFL/ESL students to emphasize successful ways of communicating in

English among international—the majority—of world speakers so that “instead of being nonnative speakers and perennial, error-prone learners of ENL, [the students] can be competent and authoritative users of ELF” (Seidlhofer “Research” 229). Murata considers the effect this difference in attitudes can have on Japanese English speakers as she observes the ways in which ELF research can influence pedagogy and thus language attitudes among different generations of English speakers in Japan: “[it] has the great potential to empower and liberate a great number of ELF users from their straitjacket of [native speaker] English, who are even now regarded as deficient users of English or rather eternal EFL learners, even when they very tactfully manage important international transactions or interactions” (84).

Thus, English language users are those who employ English to communicate among international, multilingual participants. These participants may include those for whom English is not a native language, those for whom a world English variety (e.g., Indian English) is a native language, and those for whom US-British-Australian English is a native language. When these diverse interlocutors come together at an academic conference, business meetings, tourist resort, etc., and communicate in English, they are ELF users of the language. In this research endeavor, ELF does not aim to describe a specific, prescriptive, new standard variety of English, but rather it seeks to discover what variations among features and strategies work to facilitate communication among multilingual speakers, and how those variations are adapted to different contexts, to different communicative situations.

**ELF Research** Research into ELF began with the aim to describe features that are essential to intelligibility among diverse speakers and the strategies they use to communicate in English; the results of this work was intended to be used at some later point to inform English language pedagogy worldwide. In its research, ELF has uncovered features and strategies used in

spoken language in non-native to non-native English speaker interactions; more recent research has built upon these findings by including native speakers and by expanding into written communication, much of the latter in online spaces.

Early ELF research focused largely on language features with substantial work done at the phonemic, lexical, and lexico-grammatical levels (Jenkins, Cogo and Dewey 286-7). The goal of such research was to discover features of English that may appear as errors to some but did not hinder successful communication. Jenkins's research in phonology led her to propose a Lingua Franca Core that lists the features of pronunciation that are salient for intelligibility in English. For example, Jenkins found that almost all consonant sounds were important with only a few exceptions, such as /θ/ and /ð/, for which other sounds could be substituted without loss of intelligibility (Seidlhofer "Research" 217). Lexico-grammatical research to date has amassed a list of features that appear to be commonly used in international English exchanges without introducing comprehension problems: dropping third person present tense -s (she understand), leaving out articles (we have problem), using redundant prepositions (we will discuss about), and overdoing explicitness (black color) (Poppi 44, Seidlhofer "Research" 220). Features that seem to often contribute to misunderstandings include lacking a shared vocabulary and necessary paraphrasing skills, and also use of idiomatic and metaphorical speech in fixed native-language expressions (Seidlhofer "Research" 220). These expressions are generally specific to a particular language and rely on knowledge of a particular culture (Mailsa and Karunakaran 112); thus, as Pitzl states, "viewed within a framework of language contact, idioms might thus be considered emblematic instances in which a conventionalized grouping of words represents and evokes a particular (cultural) concept, familiar to those 'in the know'" ("World" 299). In other words, knowing the cultural concept is necessary to understanding the idioms used in interactions,

which could impede communication in contexts where participants come from varied cultural backgrounds, as they are in ELF situations.

Studies in ELF pragmatics have sought to describe the strategies that ELF users employ to avoid misunderstandings in their interactions, such as repetition, code-switching, and drawing on plurilingual resources in other ways (Poppi 123, Vettorel 120). Pragmatic research has generalized that ELF communication proceeds with a large degree of mutual cooperation and as such is marked by explicitness, repetition, face-saving politeness, and other such features (Seidlhofer “Research”). As Kauer observes in his study of transcripts of ELF users, “achieving and maintaining mutual understanding in a language that is non-native to the speakers concerned is not a matter that is taken for granted; it is, in fact something that is worked at and pursued by the participants throughout the interaction” (205). While most research emphasizes this cooperative characteristic, House has challenged that point, suggesting that the cooperation and consensus is superficial and covers communicative problems at a deeper level (Seidlhofer “Research 218).

ELF research has mainly investigated the domains of tourism, school-settings, higher education, and business, with the bulk of work done in the last two areas (Jenkins, Cogo and Dewey 285, Seidlhofer “Research” 221-2). Much research examining these domains involves small- and large-scale corpora, often in conjunction with other ethnographic methods to add to the description of the communicative context being studied. In terms of larger corpora of more than a million words, the first major one was the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE), which covered many types of interactions by speakers of different language backgrounds, mostly European (*VOICE*). Specialized corpora of similar sizes have followed, such as the regionally-focused Asian Corpus of English (ACE) and the domain-focused corpus

English as Lingua Franca in Academic settings (ELFA). Other studies take advantage of smaller, locally-developed corpora, for example, transcriptions of classroom discussions or business meetings.

As ELF research has evolved, the focus has moved away from, or rather added to, its investigations of language features to examining the processes by which those features arise and the functions that they perform. As Seidlhofer notes,

Rather than limiting itself to the identification of particular linguistic features, this research has tended to take a much more processual, communicative view of ELF, of which linguistic features constitute but a part and are investigated not for their own sake but as indications of the various functions ELF fulfills in the interactions observed. So the crucial challenge has been to move from the surface description of particular features, however interesting they may be in themselves, to an explanation of the underlying significance of the forms: to ask what work they do, what functions they are symptomatic of. (Seidlhofer “Common Ground” 241)

Thus, newer ELF research not only examines the degree to which participants use paraphrasing or redundant prepositions, but also put them in context as to their function in communication, such as how they help negotiate meaning and accommodate other interlocutors. Jenkins has further called for ELF research to more fully consider the place and position of other languages in light of research into multilingualism and considerations of what constitutes a community in ELF interactions (“Repositioning”).

**ELF and English as a Native Language (ENL) Speakers** Even though processes of accommodation in ELF are of equal—arguably greater—importance for monolingual English speakers participating in multilingual communities, the position of so-called “native” speakers in



ELF research has been debated. Since one impetus for the emergence of this area of study was a turn away from native-speaker norms, early ELF research explicitly and deliberately excluded monolingual English participants. On the one hand, this exclusion allowed researchers to focus on features and processes in ways that had previously been ignored. However, monolingual English speakers take part in ELF communicative situations regularly, and excluding them ignores the reality of many communicative situations; some estimates show that 20% of global exchanges in English involve a native speaker (Seidlhofer “Research Perspectives” 209) and, indeed, in large ELF corpora such as VOICE and ELFA, native speakers are present (Carey “Hard to Ignore” 90), reflecting the reality of ELF interactions.

With an explicit call to address ENL speakers participating in ELF, Carey analyzed specific data from ELFA that included them in order to investigate accommodations that they use in ELF communicative situations, finding that self-rephrasing and unsolicited co-constructions were some of the most prominent features (“Hard to Ignore” 91). Speakers often used self-rephrasing, whether proactive or reactive, to clarify their use of idioms, whose frequent use in the corpora was “one of the most striking features of the [ENL] discourse in the analyzed ELFA transcriptions” (92) and are one of the main sources of misunderstandings Seidlhofer identified in ELF interactions (“Research” 220). In terms of unsolicited co-constructions, some instances displayed cooperative behaviors to help move discourse along by supplying a word or phrase that the speaker was pausing over (Carey “Hard to Ignore” 95); similar cooperative behaviors between native and non-native English speakers were noted by Gotti in a study of international participants in a European university course. However, Carey’s research also showed how some co-constructions appeared to be intrusive, an uncooperative overaccommodation on the part of the native speaker, whether intentionally or not (96). Carey argues that native English speakers

need to be self-aware and use linguistic resources deliberately in order to be skillful participants in ELF interactions. His data shows examples of both skillful and non-skillful participants, and thus he argues that results of this kind of work can be used to work with ENL speakers to develop these global communication skills.

In fact, ENL speakers themselves recognize several of these practices in their own communication with globally diverse speakers of English. In Margić's online survey of 377 ENL speakers, more than 85% reported adjusting their speech with non-native speakers through speaking slowly and with enunciating clearly, reducing use of idioms and colloquial phrases, and simplifying grammatical structures and vocabulary. Overall, those surveyed believed that ELF communication could not be taught explicitly in language classes as they are currently conducted, and Margić argues that these beliefs indicate a view of ELF that is "not only create[d] on the spot, but also learn[ed] on the spot" (50), demonstrating how ELF is not an established variety but rather varies according to context (50). Being able to work across variations is key in ELF interactions, for participants not only "contend with lack of shared knowledge and assumptions but also with different varieties of English, including those of native speakers, and [different] levels of competence" (Kaur "Intercultural" 137).

Overall, research into ELF examines variation of language features, the functions they serve, and the processes that form them. Widdowson notes that while in one branch of global English scholarship, World English, scholars look to describe a stable or stabilizing varieties of English in different parts of the globe, "the study of ELF considers variability not in terms of variety at all but as the variable use of English as a *inter*-community communication, as communication *across* communities" (Widdowson 362). As such, ELF research does not look to

describe a stable ELF variety but rather as the study of how users employ variable language resources.

**ELF in Academic Settings** As noted above, one of the major ELF corpora developed to date is the English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings corpus, a corpus of more than a million words of spoken discourse across disciplines, both monologic (e.g., lectures) and dialogic (e.g., discussions), by speakers from fifty-one different first language backgrounds (5% of data by ENL speakers), recorded at Finnish universities (ELFA). Research into academic ELF through this corpus has shown that metadiscourse related to hedges is as prominent in ELF academic communication as it is in academic communication generally, but one difference in ELF academic spoken communication that has emerged is that ELF communication features more frequent self-repairs (Seidlhofer “Research” 222), in which speakers repeat or paraphrase to avoid or repair misunderstandings. Other studies have looked at the use of the progressive tenses as an attention-getting technique in discourse (Ranta), the meaning making uses of code-switching (Cogo), and variation in longer chunking units (Mauranen “Chunking”).

Academic ELF has also been studied through the discourse of students in classroom settings. Using recordings of university seminars and interviews with the participants, Hynninen investigated the process of language regulation and ELF in an English-medium university in Finland. She found that students idealized the English of native speakers and ascribed to a native speaker ownership model of language, yet their expectations for interaction in English described ELF practices, such as modifying language for clarity and simplification. As one of the participants illustrated this tension “we use [English], but we don’t use it properly” (228). Professor interviews revealed that they felt responsible for regulating their students’ English and also held native-speaker ideals. When professors intervened, they did so when mutual

intelligibility was at risk in speaking and writing; they intervened more—and with more attention to ideas of correctness—in writing to ensure that the texts “met some unspecified external standards” (229). Hynninen’s work shows not only how ELF academic discourse takes place, but also participants’ beliefs about English language use, revealing a tension between native-speaker standards and multilingual ELF use.

In one of the rare works exploring the use of ELF among students in a writing course, Matsumoto examined the strategies students used to negotiate misunderstanding in a writing class of ELF students. Her findings reaffirm the importance of enhanced explicitness and of rephrasing as ELF strategies, and she further demonstrated how embodied communicative resources such as gestures and laughter play significant roles.

**ELF in Writing** ELF scholarship—indeed, all of the studies noted above—has focused primarily on oral communication. Researchers defended this focus by highlighting how written communication lacks immediate feedback from interlocutors in the moment of communication and thus lessens the creation of spontaneous variation. They argue that this lack of immediate feedback and negotiation causes interlocutors to rely more on established norms to ensure intelligibility, and written communication, especially in published works, typically has a variety of actors, such as editors, mediating the language used (Seidlhofer “Research” 223).

Nevertheless, ELF studies have begun to venture into written communication, and some have called for more research into written ELF work. For example, Horner argues that negotiation of meaning is equally important in written communication as in oral communication for neither literacy nor genres are monolithic or static as they involve negotiation between reader and writer (304). To date, most research into ELF writing examines texts with fewer mediators, such as

email communication, blogs, or online comment sections. A few have examined more mediated, more formal texts, such as edited newspaper articles and academic abstracts.

Poppi examined written ELF communication in online news stories and international business electronic communication through a series of case studies of English-language newspapers in India, China and the Baltics and then through case studies of websites and email communication in English of international companies. The newspaper articles and websites would have more mediators and represent rather formal contexts of writing, yet they still featured characteristics considered ELF. While she found wide variety in lexico-grammatical features across these texts, attesting to the highly contextual nature of ELF, she concludes that the data shows a process of negotiating a sense of the local context with the goal of global communication: the publications highlighted the local through creative expressions, lexical innovations and simplifications; the texts accommodated the global through cooperative moves such as code glosses, translations into English, or explanations (Poppi 223).

In academic publication, Lorés-Sanz analyzed sixty-six abstracts published over a period of three years by authors from seventeen non-Anglophone countries in *Social Science Research*. The aim of Lorés-Sanz's study was to examine the rhetorical patterns in the abstracts, comparing them to the traditional sequence as described by Swales and by Lewin: relevance, aim, gap, method, results, conclusions/implications. The results showed patterns of variation: simplified rhetorical structure with fewer moves and at the same time "a higher degree of textual complexity, showing different, hybrid ways of articulating moves in non-linear patterns" (77). Lorés-Sanz suggests that this preliminary study sheds light on possible ways in which increasing numbers of ELF academics are influencing rhetorical styles in scholarly writing (78).

Carey's study of formulaic chunks and their approximations in spoken and written academic ELF situations challenged the earlier rationales for focusing on spoken language over written communication in ELF. He found that different variations of the formulaic chunks, for example "so to say" for "so to speak," were used in speaking and writing, yet those differences were not statistically significant (Carey "On the Other Side" 215-6), leading him to the conclusion that "the gap between spoken and written ELF may not be that great" (226). For the written data in Carey's study, he used data from the nascent Corpus of Written English as a Lingua Franca (WrELFA), a data source started in 2011 and made of unedited research papers, PhD examination reports, and research blogs in the sciences, social sciences and humanities (WrELFA). This corpus was deliberately built from ELF texts that had fewer mediators and modifications, thus representing more in-the-moment communication and closer to speech than some of the formal texts noted above. The WrELFA corpus was still being compiled during Carey's research, so he notes that his conclusions for writing are quite preliminary (226), yet the existence of the WrELFA, completed in 2015 with over one and a half million words, provides a base for more research into written academic ELF.

Linguistic analyses of online discourse have illustrated how this computer-mediated communication holds a middle ground between the typical distinctions drawn between writing and oral language (Baron, Crystal). In fact, the studies of ELF writing above reflect this blended feature since most of the data comes from online sources and many from interactive spaces such as blogs and their comment spaces, spaces that have more of a conversational feature in that writers respond to each other without lengthy editorial participation by others (Carey). As Poppi notes in her examination of international business communication in English, writing in email is a kind of representation of informal spoken language as it is often less carefully edited and

treated as ephemeral (179). Even in her studies of published newspaper articles, she found that “although the written language is highly standardized and codified and is often subjected to processes of linguistic revision, the analysis of the articles taken from *The China Daily* has clearly revealed the presence of localized creative expressions which serve the purpose of better expressing the Chinese culture, way of life, as well as the country’s national priorities” (122-3). Writers use such linguistic variety when composing in instructional online spaces as well. Especially given the rise in OWI and concurrent rise in global enrollments in such courses, these spaces offer great potential in extending the research into written ELF. By examining ELF in the less mediated and more conversational discourse areas such as discussion forums, this study can reveal ELF processes and features in a writing instructional environment that can be further examined in future research into other areas of writing and writing instruction, such as the more formal assignments that writing classes typically include. In this way, this research mirrors the ELF research into writing presented above: beginning with writing in interactive online spaces (WrElfa, discussion forums) that can lead to investigation into more formal writing (abstracts, final writing course texts).

### **Implications for U.S. Composition**

This investigation into the processes in which global students use English in online writing instructional spaces comes at a time when the composition field is actively examining its use, assumptions, and attitudes about the language. The traditional assumption has been of monolingual native English speakers writing for a readership of the same; composition has been undergoing a revolutionary shift from that stance. While the issue of language is not new (CCCC *Students*, CCCC *Second*), it has renewed activity this decade and has (re)raised questions about readers’ stances toward language and the role of language negotiation (e.g., Canagarajah,

Horner, Lee, Lorimer Leonard, Matsuda “Writing”).

As composition grapples with issues of language diversity, writing faculty can make harmful assumptions about students based on language variations, oral or written. In her interviews with faculty across the university curriculum regarding their beliefs and experiences working with ESL students, Zamel found that “language use was confounded with intellectual ability” (507), a stance that made her recall Victor Villanueva’s own experience as a student in which he noted the same conflation of language and intellect. While Zamel was writing in 1995, the concerns of this conflation remain current: in their 2018 analysis of pervasive monolingual ideologies in composition, Watson and Shapiro call attention to the ways in which efforts to resist such ideologies are incomplete in that they often fail to address the underlying standard language ideology in which “any non-standard English language use is understood as ignorance, inability, or error, representing deviance from the norm,” and as deviance, such language users are excluded, segregated, and tracked out of the mainstream.

This research has illustrated the pervasive practice of foregrounding second-language writers’ deficiencies, what has come to be known as a deficit model of language (Zamel 510). In Marshall’s study of how domestic Canadian multilingual students in university are re-identified as ESL, he emphasizes how students’ multilingual and multicultural knowledge is subsumed, ignored, and negated by the use of the very terms such as ESL, which inherently suggests deficit and remediation (51). He notes how faculty refer to “the ESL problem” yet rarely discuss the benefits these students bring to class (52). Similarly, Zawacki and Habib describe how “error” prevailed as a theme in their faculty interviews about second language writing, and that some faculty grappled with that term in terms of defining what it looked like in writing and how much judgements about error would affect evaluation (185-7). In these deficit view of



faculty, “multilingual competence is thus relegated to a deficit secondary status” (Marshall 52). Overall, this deficit model illustrates “a lack of recognition in educational settings of sociolinguistic diversity and multiplicity” (Marshall 51). Students themselves, as Zawacki and Habib note, hold deficient attitudes, focusing on weaknesses and problems when describing their own writing (184). Some students resist such a deficit orientation by rejecting the label entirely, claiming “English may be my second language but I’m not ‘ESL’” (Ortmeier-Hooper). This continued emphasis on deficit and remediation affects students’ identities negatively and positions them as eternally lacking writers.

This focus on deficiency is compounded by language ideologies and myths of transience and of language homogeneity. The myth of transience treats language as a discrete skill separate from content knowledge; thus, in view of this myth, language needs to be perfected separately, in classes outside of the academy, before one can participate in university coursework (Zamel 509). Accordingly, students should not be able to participate in mainstream courses until they are very like their native-English-speaking counterparts (Zamel 509). Zamel calls out the unrealistic “and ultimately counterproductive” expectation that English language programs and writing courses would create students with the same discourse and language expertise across the board, for “the process of acquisition is slow-paced and continues to evolve with exposure, immersion, and involvement[;] learning is responsive to situations in which students are invited to participate in the construction of meaning and knowledge” (Zamel 517), which is to say that students acquire language as they use it in new situations, and the pedagogical practices that faculty can employ to support that acquisition as they invite students to participate in knowledge creation are practices that create rich experiences for all learners in the course (518).

Combining with the myth of transience, the myth of linguistic homogeneity posits that students in a composition classroom share the same language backgrounds (Matsuda “Myth”); as noted before, the typical stance is that of monolingual, native-English-speaking (or non-native speakers who have transited to fluency mimicking that of such a speaker) writing for other monolingual writers. However, this is not the case, for multilingual students and writers are found along a continuum in university writing class in the US. Multilingual writers include international students who have primarily learned English in foreign language classes abroad (English as a foreign language, EFL) and students whose mother tongue and/or home language is not English and have learned or are learning English in the US (English as a Second Language, ESL). Generation 1.5 describes immigrant students who were born outside the US but have received at least some of their formal K-12 education in that nation (Roberge, Siegal, and Harklau). Some composition scholars call attention to “late arriving” and “early arriving” immigrants along with the differences those two groups exhibit in their texts and in their language learning experiences (Ferris “Teaching”). These students bring their multilingual practices into US writing instructional spaces, including spaces designed primarily for monolingual writers and readers. Even when writing programs have a variety of course options in place meant to sort writers, Matsuda *et al.* have noted that “[t]he complexity of placement decisions suggests that L2 writers can be found in any type of writing course within US first-year composition programs. It further suggests that all writing teachers—regardless of the type of courses they teach—need to be aware of the presence and needs of various types of student in their classes and be prepared to address those needs” (70). A linguistically homogeneous student population is the anomaly if such a thing indeed exists, and heterogeneity is the norm.

The impact of deficit stances resulting from beliefs in transience and of linguistic homogeneity impacts writing instruction environments, particularly when such environments depend on the relationship between the participants for learning. Sociocultural theories of learning posit that learning is not only a cognitive activity but also a social one, that knowledge is created, learned, and retained through interactions with knowledgeable others (Leki “Negotiating” 138). In this view, relations between faculty and students is key to learning, and if faculty have a deficit identity toward learners, the environment is less suited for success. In interviews with faculty and students, Leki found that “it became clear that [students’] relationships with and reactions to faculty and other students they interacted with both aided and impeded their work” (Leki “Negotiating” 139). She also adds “The relationships that students, including L2 students, are able or unable to develop and sustain with others—faculty and peers—also have an impact on students’ educational experiences and may in fact go some long way toward determining the success or failure of those experiences” (Leki “Negotiating” 150).

Writing instructors can, of course, engage in ways that recognize linguistic diversity as a norm and bring understanding of language varieties that enhance the chances of student success in these experiences. Zamel had found that some faculty respond in ways that reflect understandings about how language use evolves in different contexts and respond to students with that in mind (509). In Leki’s interviews, faculty called attention to the analytical skills vocabulary-building aptitude, and cross-cultural experiences that multilingual students brought to their courses (Leki “Negotiating” 143). Faculty understanding of how ELF variation works in global spaces can enhance their understandings of their diverse students’ writing and help them support practices that enhance their success.

With its researched emphasis on accommodation and strategic flexibility in English language use, ELF can contribute an understanding of how multilingual writers vary English to use it in productive ways, variations which may initially strike composition instructors as problematic. Horner articulates the possibilities that ELF research has for composition:

Research on English as a lingua franca hold the potential to counter the English-only ideology dominating U.S. composition insofar as it calls into question that ideology's reifications of English and its linking of (fixed) identity with (fixed) language, insofar as it challenges the conduit model of communication, and insofar as it emphasizes the contributions of language users labor to the production of the meanings forms and contexts of language. (300)

Horner envisions a composition pedagogy influenced by ELF's focus on tolerance for linguistic diversity and strategies of accommodation (302). Furthermore, ELF's foundation in communication between persons of diverse linguacultural backgrounds brings concrete research to NCTE's 2008 "Definition of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Literacies<sup>1</sup>" in the areas of communicating with

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<sup>1</sup> During the revision phase of this dissertation a revised statement has been published. The original 2008 statement named "Definition of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Literacies" had an introductory paragraph and six points to complete the phrase "Twenty-first century readers and writers need to" which included "Build relationships with others to pose and solve problems collaboratively and cross culturally" and "Design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes." This study connects those two points to an internationally diverse audience.

The new statement named "Definition of Literacy in a Digital Age" and dated 7 November 2019 has revised and expanded the original six points to eight and adds explanatory material to the framework. The points to complete the phrase "Active, successful participants in a global society must be able to" includes "Build and sustain intentional global and cross-cultural connections and relationship with others so to pose and solve problems collaboratively and strengthen independent thought" and "Recognize and honor the multilingual literacy identities and culture experiences individuals bring to learning environments and provide opportunities to promote, amplify, and encourage these differing variations of language (e.g., dialect, jargon, register)." However, the explanatory material is strongly rooted in US minority (English speaking) communities. For example, "global connections" has no elaboration in the explanation, which focuses on cooperation versus collaboration, and "multicultural" connects to US populations. The explanation under "multilingual literacy identities" notes dialect, jargon, and register, but leaves out other languages. In these ways and others, the new statement focuses on the US national context and important conversations connected to US domestic minority groups. Despite this focus, the statement and the reality

global audiences and working intentionally with cross-cultural participants, which may involve rethinking what competence in language would mean in such writing situations. Canagarajah argues that today's students working in a globalized world need to develop multiple competencies in a variety of literate practices in order to be such "functional postmodern global citizens" (591). Watson and Shapiro recognize that being exposed to and working with "the realities of linguistic diversity" creates an important environment for students' development of intercultural communication skills. Composition is well-situated to foster the development of such literate practices in order for students to function deftly in global writing situations, including those negotiating across cultural and linguistic differences.

Working with language differences is a perennial issue in composition with renewed interest, relevance, and importance in current works. These current conversations feature calls to understand the effort required not only of the reader but also the writer (Horner). This call for patience and effort echoes the fundamental characteristics noted by ELF research: the techniques that the participants use to accommodate each other and avoid misunderstanding. These same qualities are highlighted in Matsuda's contribution to a compilation of threshold concepts in composition, when he writes how all writers are engaged in negotiating language differences (Matsuda "Writing involves...").

ELF perspectives not only contribute to composition's conversations about such language negotiation. Throughout language diversity work in composition, scholars call attention to attitudes toward difference: difference as deficit or difference as resource. This attitude toward

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of our world does leave room for consideration of globally diverse audience, even if not explicitly noted in this version of the statement.

difference is one of the key features of ELF, one that is often used to distinguish ELF from EFL:<sup>2</sup> “Whereas EFL is underpinned by theories of [first language] interference and fossilization..., ELF is underpinned by theories of language contact and evolution....As a result, while in EFL code-switching is regarded as evidence of a gap in a [non-native English speaker’s] English knowledge, in ELF it is seen as a crucial bilingual pragmatic resource” (Jenkins, Cogo, and Dewey 284). This resource also plays a part in theories of multicompetence, which treat multilingual students as “successful multicompetent speakers, not failed native speakers” (Cook, as qtd in Lorimer Leonard 230). In other words, in ELF features that deviate from ENL norms are not automatically judged as errors but rather are explored as possible strategic use of linguistic resources in a given context. Here again, calls in composition ask for adopting a similar stance, as Matsuda writes “...readers and writing teachers cannot assume that what were once considered errors are indeed errors; they may reflect language practices perfectly acceptable in some parts of the world—or even different parts of the same country” (“Writing Involves” 69).

The work in this dissertation project brings to these conversations both a sense of how internationally diverse uses of English work in online instructional spaces and an insight into how an ELF lens can contribute to composition’s understanding of those uses. This study begins this understanding by examining participants’ use, strategies, and stances towards global English language variation in discussion forum areas in a course; the results and process from this work can then be used to examine other areas of writing instruction such as peer review and major course assignments. With these understandings, composition researchers and instructors can

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<sup>2</sup> While ELF researchers contrast their position to EFL, other categories of multilingual English writers and contexts, such as ESL and Generation 1.5 – or early/late arriving immigrant students – also face “difference as deficit” stances.

continue to uncover and encourage practices in online writing courses that help students to become responsible, adept, online global citizens. Lee and Jenkins argue that composition is a site to encourage such student development as more heterogeneous students and instructors take part in the online space and because “it is through language and literacy that social hierarchies [such as those surrounding standard language ideologies] are established and perpetuated, but also challenged” (322).

Indeed, Hewett and Warnock argue that online writing instruction (OWI) is a site where re-envisioning of composition can take place, that, in fact, OWI is the future of composition as more classes and course activities inexorably employ more and new technologies for writing, learning, research, etc. Thus, they assert that examining current and cultivating new practices is necessary to not only have sound OWI, but, indeed, to have sound composition. This project can contribute to this re-envisioning in two areas Hewett and Warnock attend to: rethinking the learners in the course by understanding our student populations, perhaps in new ways” (553) and being good teachers who “use their writing studies knowledge to benefit a wider variety of learners than ever before” (551). Following these areas of transformation, this study aims to understand how online students use their linguistic resources to communicate in English across varieties and around the world; instructors can use that knowledge to adapt their practices to suit such a global audience.

Chapter two delves into OWI environments, describing multilingual writers’ participation in them and connecting that participation to MOOCs specifically. This chapter also focuses attention to the pedagogical challenges and potential of communication among internationally diverse participants on discussion boards connected to OWI. Chapter three describes the methodology for this work, including how discourse analysis is used to examine the specific

discussion forums of the writing MOOC for this study. This chapter describes the structure of the MOOC for the study and gives demographic data for the globally diverse participants in it. The chapter describes in detail how the analysis proceeded from coding features previously established in ELF research to adding new codes emerging from the discourse under examination. Finally, the chapter connects the coded findings to this study's three research questions.

Chapters four, five, and six present and discuss the results in detail, using data from specific codes to answer each research question. Chapter four shows how participants' explicit mentions of language reflect attitudes that tolerate, even value, language variation—including in conversations centered on language standards. Chapter five discusses how participants mostly accommodate their use of cultural-specific language, namely idioms, to strategically negotiate the local and the global in their online discourse. In the final section on study results, chapter six examines the lexico-grammatical variation in articles, prepositions, and particles as well as in the treatment of *research* as a count noun and the overgeneralization of the verb *make*. This analysis argues that these variations cannot only be categorized as language learner errors, but that they also reflect established variations in ELF research that indicate global language practices.

Finally, chapter seven summarizes the study as a whole and notes its limitations. This chapter also discusses how the results of the study hold implications for pedagogical practices in writing instruction, both in online and in other environments, that recognize the global position of English and allow for students to develop their abilities to connect with culturally and linguistically diverse audiences and teams.



## CHAPTER 2

### ONLINE WRITING ENVIRONMENTS AND MOOCS AS SITES OF ELF COMMUNICATION

#### **Introduction**

As noted in the previous chapter, the presence of online, US-based composition courses has grown, in part due to institutions' internationalization responses to globalization. Given the ways online writing instruction (OWI) can be used to re-envision composition as noted at the end of chapter one, understanding how global students participate in OWI allows envisioning pedagogies inclusive of culturally and linguistically diverse learners. Online instructional environments can benefit multilingual writers by affording them time to process language to create responses in spaces such as asynchronous discussion boards (Boynton, Wang, Warnock). However, the increased literacy load and cultural conflicts can cause difficulties (Hewett, Miller-Cochran, Sujo de Montes et al.). These characteristics of OWI environments demand that in the planning and development of courses with global participants, instructors understand how multilingual English users vary their language use in different online writing environments. This chapter will review issues in OWI relevant to globally diverse students, including writing MOOCs. It will briefly discuss the history and position of MOOCs, including global participation and academic writing instruction in these spaces. The chapter will close with a description of how discourse in the context of a writing instruction MOOC is situated to answer the project's central questions.

#### **Online Writing Instruction (OWI)**

Online instructional spaces, including online writing courses (OWC), occur in different forms: they may meet entirely online or have a blended format in which some meetings are

online and some are in a more traditional classroom space. Some courses meet synchronously, with all participants online at the same time, yet more often courses meet asynchronously, with participants logging in and working at different hours within periodic deadlines. These instructional spaces use a variety of communication tools, such as live video, recorded video, email, wikis, document exchanges, and chat spaces. However, no matter what assortment of tools employed, communication in online spaces primarily relies on text; as St Amant recognizes in his examination of language in online education spaces, “[m]ost online media restrict interactions to typed communiqués. As a result, discourse in online classes often reduces exchanges to texts, or typed words, on a digital page” (25), a feature that can significantly affect interaction. The text-based nature of the elements in OWCs demonstrate new opportunities for writing classrooms, both opportunities for increased writing and opportunities for participation by global participants.

**Increased Writing Practice in OWI** Since the majority of communication in OWI spaces take place through text, much of what would have been oral communication in traditional class spaces become places to practice writing. Students are not only writing paper drafts, outlines, revisions, etc. but also use writing to communicate with instructors and classmates over email, on message boards, in paper comments, and others. Warnock calls attention to the presence of text communication in OWCs as significantly increased opportunities to write (68): “students are writing all the time on message boards” (70) to a variety of audiences with whom they can “practice invention skills, take risks, and develop their own authoritative voices” (70). These features of OWI text communication not only support writing development generally but also are spaces for developing skills for written communication to globally diverse audiences.

All of this communication, done through writing, is not an “extra” part of OWI: using writing to connect with others in online education spaces is key because, as Hewett notes, student satisfaction in OWI is closely connected to contact (5). One of the main places that students make contact—with the professor, with other students—in a course are on discussion boards. Students do not only use these spaces for class activities; discussion boards can also be a key part of connection with other participants on both class and extracurricular matters. For example, in her autonarrative about designing and running her college’s first online writing course for advanced ESL students, Brickman highlights how students utilized the discussion board space she provided for non-course topics and were able to communicate with each other on the learning management system in ways outside of course assignments (360).

**Increased Participation in OWIs** In the course of class activities, online discussion forums open up the floor for more participants to take part, particularly in asynchronous environments, than in traditional classroom spaces. In terms of class discussions, Warnock notes that “[s]ome students might be shy about speaking their minds in a classroom conversation or even a fast-paced [synchronous] chat setting, where by the time you respond, the rest of the group is on to another topic” (70). In her reflections on her own teaching experiences, Boynton calls attention to the fact that in reflection on what appeared to be a particularly dynamic traditional class discussion, in reality only about a quarter of the students actually participated, and, as for the others, “[t]here were many who didn’t come prepared, many who were afraid to speak, some who had the right comment but thought of it after the wrong question and so that comment shriveled up like a dried-out seed, never to bear fruit” (303).

However, in OWCs, many discussions take place on message boards or similar systems. In these environments, students can view and re-view discussion turns as they wish, confirming

their understanding of the flow of the conversation; they have time to compose their answers; and they do not lose the floor to others. Even in the early days of networked computer use in writing classrooms, Faigley noted this affordance, which he argued equalized the playing field for student participation in discussion (167). As Boynton more recently put it “teaching online turns all the microphones on” (303) to open up participation for all the students in the class.

These benefits are not restricted to US and ENL situations. In her analysis of online courses in higher education institutions in Asia and America, Wang found that US, Chinese, and Korean students had an affinity for asynchronous communication; the last two groups commonly noting that the discussion boards “allowed them to think through the discussion topics and to contribute more thoughtful and better worded ideas” (303) when working in any of the languages used in the courses. In a comparison of participation of native- and non-native speakers of English in face-to-face and online synchronous discussions, Freiermuth found that in small groups, the number and length of turns in online environments were more equitable in these mixed groups than they were in face-to-face group work. He notes that “[l]earners do not have to worry about mispronunciations, accent, or using the wrong word. Online chatting allows more time to edit...learners can focus attention to what language they can produce, rather than allowing apprehension to keep them from participating” (190). Echoing these views, a graduate school classmate of mine from Japan noted that in online discussions, she “never missed her turn.” Thus, the online format has multiple advantages for multilingual students’ participation.

**Lack of Visual Cues in OWI** While written communication allows for much participation, the lack of visual cues can increase the chances for misunderstanding. Indeed, Hewett argues that the increased literacy load resulting from the removal of “body/face/voice” cues and resulting reliance on text for communication is the “most critical difference” between

writing instruction that takes place in online spaces and that of traditional physical classrooms (3, 169). For example, Brickman noted that the tone of email messages was one of the main challenges she had working in an online environment:

In [face to face] courses, the instructor can soften the impact of a verbal comment by tone of voice and facial expressions, but the Internet options are limited to emoticons of smiling, winking, or frowning faces. In addition, after typing repetitive responses to a similar question, instructors may inadvertently make comments that appear abrupt to the student. Curt written remarks can be hurtful and discouraging, especially when student receive them on corrected papers. (362)

Considering ELF and writing instruction in light of these considerations, Mastumoto's study of ELF communication in a writing class showed how the student made abundant use of embodied communication in their interactions. When that embodied resource is not as available due to the medium of communication, ELF interactants would need to rely on different multimodal resources in online environments.

**Cross-Cultural Issues in OWI** In addition to the difficulties of missing non-textual cues such as facial expressions and other body language, cross-cultural issues can arise online as easily as in traditional face-to-face classrooms. Little work has been done to date regarding the participation of multilingual students on discussion boards of writing courses, yet some has been done in other online educational contexts. Studies of online interaction of culturally and linguistically diverse graduate students in non-composition classes have found that cultural clashes occur in which students from some groups at first refrain from then later accommodate to the participant styles of their Western classmates (Ståle Angen Rye 10-11) and/or stop participating when cultural clashes occur (Sujo de Montes, Oran, and Willis). On the other hand,

a study of peer-review between Swedish graduate students and American undergraduates in an online technical communication course demonstrated that with time and intentional design, students not only made more productive writing comments, but also began to comment on possible cultural differences in ways to further the discussion and demonstrate their understanding of where miscommunications might have occurred (Bradley). In theory, such online interactions could positively impact development of skills related to working with diverse groups, a goal endorsed by NCTE through its statement on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Literacies. However, very little work in this area has been done to date.

**Language in OWI** Online writing courses open to global, multilingual participants hold promise in terms of access and also cautions in terms of language and culture. St Amant points out that bringing courses to an international market “involves more than just allowing international students to enroll in existing online courses” (17) but that two conditions must be met:

1. Planning and development of online courses and curricula must be designed specifically for international delivery to groups of culturally diverse students
2. Online instructors need to receive training in how different international factors could affect student success in their courses. (17-8)

For St Amant, the issues in need of address are access, design, scheduling, and language (18). In terms of language, when US institutions offer courses in English to a global audience, participants should incorporate an awareness of language considerations such as global Englishes and register variations. Students, indeed all language users, employ language as part of their identity and engage different styles depending on the context of the communication. Thus, global student in online courses will likely use language in ways that is both important for their

engagement with the course and also potentially uncomfortable for instructors who do not have an awareness of these considerations.

Research into second language students' language use in social media spaces shows that they switch languages and registers as they communicate in different online spaces (DePew and Miller-Cochran), and instructors should be aware that students may similarly employ different linguistic resources in email, chat, and discussion board postings than they may in formal, revised academic writing (DePew 70). In fact, students' texts in different online spaces can reflect their deliberate choices to use nonstandard constructions to suit the context and purposes of their posts (DePew 70). Many forms of online communication mixes characteristics of written and spoken language, and thus written texts can—appropriately—exhibit characteristics of spoken language (Crystal *Internet*, Baron *Alphabet*). Baron notes that online discourse resembles speech in being often unedited, containing many first- and second-person pronouns, often featuring present tense and contractions, and being generally informal, and she notes other online communication characteristics that resemble writing such as the durable nature of the medium, and participants' common use of a wide range of vocabulary and complex syntax (*Always On* 48). In Crystal's examination of online discourse in light of speech and writing, he concludes that it "is better seen as written language that has been pulled some way in the direction of speech than as spoken language that has been written down" (*Language Revolution* 78) but that overall online forms are not just a spoken and written language, but that rather it has properties of its own. Thus, users of internet language, including participants in an online writing course, would not always contribute to online communications in ways that that strictly adhere to properties associated with written language but rather would appropriately use elements of spoken language and other online-discourse-specific elements. Course instructors need to be

aware of this variability as they create classes and make assumptions about students' English abilities. Instructors can anticipate these differences, understand them when they occur, and consider them in course design, assignments and assessment.

### **Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)**

Many of the same affordances and challenges seen in OWI area also at play in MOOC environments, the site for this study. The acronym stands for Massive Open Online Course, a moniker that emerged near the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. As its name suggests, a MOOC is a course held *online*, hosted by established universities or other organizations. MOOCs are *open* for anyone to enroll; one does not need to be a registered student at a particular institution or pay fees to join, at least in the original MOOCs. With such access, *massive* numbers of students can register: numbers into the hundreds of thousands have been reported for several courses. MOOCs were seen as a way to provide expanded access to education. They were touted as resources for students who needed to be able to review material several times or needed remedial help to cope with advanced courses. MOOCs were lauded in that students from all corners of the globe could access MOOCs from top universities. MOOCs were also seen as efficient and cost-cutting, as thousands of students could enroll without restrictions of classroom space and individual instructional attention (Decker, Hesse). The phenomenon of MOOCs took several running steps into higher education, including into writing instruction, before slowing down and moving to a variety of paths, including human resources training for workplaces. While MOOCs did not revolutionize higher education as some had claimed they would, MOOCs brought about conversations about teaching and examinations of learning environments. For example, it provided data on many aspects about the teaching of writing and raised many interesting questions about what good instruction entails, including ideal



class sizes for writing instruction. This study contributes to such conversations on education: as large numbers of global students enrolled in MOOCs, these spaces provide data on how linguistically diverse participants communicate in English in order to get the work of the course done and to connect with other participants. As such, MOOC composition spaces can illuminate ways in which participants use ELF to communicate about writing.

**MOOC formats: connectivist and extended** MOOCs are generally categorized into two types: cMOOCs and xMOOCs. The original MOOCs were the former, and the “c” designation relates to their features that connected the participants to each other. These MOOCs used the technological affordances of the internet to connect the participants to create a collaborative community of learners which worked together in a constructivist manner (Andersen *et al.* 223). In these connectivist MOOCs, course content was in part delivered by readings and videos, and in part developed through discussions among participants. Peer review was the main way of getting feedback on individual learning.

As MOOCs proliferated, they evolved in ways that would more “efficiently” work with large numbers of participants, relying less on collaboration and connectivity and more on presentation of content and assessment that could be machine graded. These types are called xMOOCs, “x” for “extended,” reflecting their ability to accommodate an extended number of participants. Anderson *et al.* notes that for xMOOCs, “the design could be said to embody a new type of “teacher” — in the shape of a grouped combination of software and interface intended to facilitate teaching and learning” (223). Like, cMOOCs, xMOOCs use video and connected readings to convey content, but xMOOCs rely on them to a greater extent and use computer-graded assessments such as quizzes and tests. Discussions and connections with other participants are less emphasized (Andersen, *et al.*, Daniels).

**MOOC Development** The first course generally identified as a MOOC was a class on networked learning hosted by Stephen Downs and George Siemens at Manitoba University in 2008. Twenty-five students in the course were regular fee-paying students, and more than two thousand others took the same class online without fees or credit (Andersen *et al.* 223). Over the next four years, MOOCs proliferated, particularly xMOOCs. By the time MOOC fever spiked in 2012, a number of prestigious schools in the United States had started offering MOOCs, and a number of private ventures had begun, including the three major platforms edX, Udacity, and Coursera (Daniels, El Ahrache *et al.*). In this heyday of MOOCs, some universities experimented with linking MOOCs with credits and credentialing, from additional MOOC modules to materials for existing university-credit course to stand-alone MOOC degrees (Lederman). Udacity has concentrated its efforts on corporate training. On the other hand, Coursera recently announced several new graduate degrees, mostly in technology and business, and has worked on its own undergraduate degree.

During this frenzy, many made grand claims about the disruptive power of MOOCs, as Pope summarizes

The most enthusiastic advocates of MOOCs believe that [these courses] stood poised to overturn the century-old model of higher education. Their interactive technology promised to deliver top-tier teaching from institutions like Harvard, Stanford, and MIT, not to a few hundred students in a lecture hall on ivy-draped campuses, but free via the Internet to thousand or even millions around the world. At long last, there appeared to be a solution to the problem of “scaling up” higher education: if it were delivered efficiently, the relentless cost increases might finally be rolled back. Some wondered whether MOOCs would merely transform the existing system or blow it up entirely. (Pope)

However, instead of “blowing up” the system of higher education, practical complications and pedagogical questioning began to dominate discussions about MOOCs.

One main issue was funding. The original model of the MOOC was to put online recordings of and materials from existing courses from prestigious universities, which were funded by the tuition-paying, credit-earning students at the home institutions. As MOOCs and MOOC platforms developed independently of those funding sources, questions of the sustainability of the model arose. Grants can fund the development of a MOOC in some cases, as in the writing MOOCs noted below. More commonly, fees are attached to MOOCs. For example, some MOOCs may be free to participate, but in order to receive some kind of credit, a Udacity credit or badge toward a Coursera certificate, participants would pay a fee for the MOOC (Daniels, Lederman). As of late 2018, edX, Udacity, and Coursera had started to systematically build paywalls around content that had previously been freely available (Reich and Ruipérez-Valiente).

While paying for MOOCs brings the “open” part of the acronym into question, the “massive” character also leads to complications. Daniels critiqued that while enthusiasts highlighted the pedagogical innovations to scale education up to many participants online, in reality “the teaching methods are based on very old and out-dated behaviorist pedagogy, relying primarily on information transmission, computer-marked assignments and peer assessment...the useful techniques that it is discovering—and likes to claim it has invented—area already well-known in distance learning and in some cases go back 40 years.” Pope summarized it thus: “For all the hype, MOOCS are really just content—the latest iteration of the textbook” (Pope). These critiques call attention to the characteristics that xMOOCs rely on for scale, yet cMOOCs have also instigated questions about pedagogy, especially in terms of the roles participants play and

the place of technology in teaching endeavors. At times, the technology constraints directed pedagogical decisions, which helped lead to the demise of some MOOCs (Head).

While “massive” numbers of participants enroll in MOOCs, a far lower number complete them. For example, an MIT MOOC Mechanics ReView had 17,000 participants; about 10% submitted the second assignment; about half of those finished the course (Pope). Similar disparities are so common as to be noted as a feature of MOOCs, and the trend persists: in Reich and Ruipérez-Valiente’s study of over five hundred edX courses from 2012-2018, the low completion rates remained unchanged over the six years. At first glance, this disparity between the number of enrolled participants and those who complete the MOOC seems extremely problematic, but closer examination reveals that the flexibility of MOOCs allow participants to enroll in them with various purposes in mind. After enrolling, participants can browse the content with their goals, interests, and abilities in mind. If they decide the MOOC would not fulfill their purpose, they can choose not to complete it. Other participants may treat the course as a collection of *à la carte* units, completing the ones that best fulfill their needs (Bloch 171, Halasek *et al.*, Zhenghao *et al.*). With these considerations in mind, the attrition rate does not appear to be an indication of MOOC failure but rather as an indication of how participants take advantage of the MOOC to suit their needs. Also, the numbers who do complete a particular MOOCs outpace the numbers who could take it in person. As Anant Argawal, head of edX, noted about one MOOC in which about 7,000 of the 155,000 passed, “If you look at the number in absolute terms, it’s as many students as might take the course in 40 years at MIT” (Daniels).

Yet, the idea of who participates in MOOCs raises questions about how this online education innovation fulfills its proclaimed goals of opening up education to serve greater numbers of learners who may not financially or geographically otherwise have access to these

levels of education. One argument in that category stated that students who needed remedial help would benefit from MOOCs: they could revisit material, replay lectures, and take more time if they needed to in order to review materials. Some MOOC units may supplement material from an on-campus course and help students bolster their knowledge. However, over time it became apparent that those who were most successful in MOOCs were those who were already well-suited to higher education systems and knew how to navigate the content on their own. Generally speaking, “markers of socioeconomic status [correlate] with greater persistence and certification” (Reich and Ruipérez-Valiente). Even among those who completed MOOCs, differences in motivations and results appear. A Harvard Business Review survey of 52,000 MOOC completers from around the world found that the two main reasons for enrolling in a MOOC were for career advancement (just over half) and for educational benefits (almost a third) (Zhengao *et al.*). While those with higher education and socioeconomic status reported general career benefits such as “enhanced skills,” those from lower backgrounds reported tangible career benefits from the MOOC such as “receiving a promotion.” While the large majority of participants with education aims reported achieving some benefit such as refreshing knowledge or “gain[ing] knowledge essential for my field of study,” less than a fifth reported any tangible benefit in terms of completing prerequisites or gaining credit (Zhengao *et al.*). There has been evidence that barriers to participation—such as internet access and computer skills, prerequisite knowledge, and costs—are higher among underprivileged populations (Oudeweetering and Agirdag 3). In sum, instead of equalizing education for more people, MOOCs appear to work well for participants who already know the education culture and environment and have the socioeconomic status to access the online units.

## **Global Participants in MOOCs**

While the appeal of MOOCs for university administration and capital ventures lay in perceived efficiencies and scaling up of university instruction, the altruistic aim for MOOCs for many, as noted at the beginning of this section, is to expand education availability to corners of the globe where access to higher education is geographically or systematically difficult, the “shimmering home [to] bring the best education in the world to the most remote learners on the planet” (Pappanov). Indeed, participants in MOOCs come from all over the world: Coursera records more than 70% of enrollees in its courses from outside of the United States, and similar figures are reported for individual courses, for example MIT’s “Software as Service” in 2012 had three quarters participants from outside the US as did The Ohio State University writing MOOC. Overall, US participants are overly represented in MOOCs as compared to proportion to the world’s population, and the opposite holds for participants from the developing world (Oudeweetering and Agigdag 7). In their review of MOOCs between 2012 and 2018, Reich and Ruipérez-Valiente found that at the beginning of that period, 80% of MOOC participants came from countries at the higher end of the United Nations Development Index, and the percentage from affluent countries grew in the years following. One reason for less access from developing countries connects to issues related to access to technology (Bloch 166, Reich and Ruipérez-Valiente). Even access to the devices and connection to the internet does not surmount all the technological barriers; for example, Head found that in her writing MOOC, some of the resources that they had chosen specifically because they were “freely available” in reality were not; for example, participants from Pakistan could not access the YouTube videos because that site is banned in their country.

Outside of economic and technological barriers in some parts of the world, Oudeweetering and Agirdag point out that other possible reasons for the disparity in global participation involve a preference for MOOCs hosted by one's own country, in one's language, and in cultural customs similar to one's own (8). As they elaborate:

...there are fewer barriers to MOOCs than to higher education. Still, the remaining barriers seem to specifically hamper access for underprivileged populations [e]specially in remote areas in developing countries.... Even though MOOCs require less financial investment or social and cultural proximity to higher education institution, the results show that individuals with little financial resources or in less culturally or socially dominant contexts experience evident barriers towards MOOC participation (Oudeweetering and Agirdag 8).

Halasek *et al.* sounds a similar note about how instructional design is informed by economic, socioeconomic, and cultural assumptions based on “artifacts of bricks-and-mortar universities” (168), namely, universities from globally privileged locations. At a meeting of international educators, African Virtual University professor Bakary Diallo called attention to how students in different parts of the world have their “own realities” and “their own context and culture” that affects how they participate in online classrooms (Sharma).

A team of researchers led by Andersen specifically investigated ways in which a MOOC imposes cultural authority in ways that can make it difficult for participants from various world cultures to participate. They studied how MOOC courses are “tacitly based on the course designers' lifeworlds” (221), defined as the values, perceptions, and beliefs that develop over people's lifetimes (226). The researchers took part in a US xMOOC as global participants, paying attention to features of the MOOC that guided their actions and influence behavior (227).

For example, even at the very beginning of the course, during introductions, the researchers encountered complications “concerning the importance of status as related to age and ‘face’” for some participants, not knowing the age and status of participants was a problem in terms of knowing how to address them and found themselves silent compared to other participants because of this cultural barrier” (230-1). Such issues in communication would be even more prominent in cMOOCs that rely on participants’ contact and activity in order to build the knowledge of the course. Pappanov comments that the diversity of MOOC takers means that they can lack a common knowledge base upon which to give each other feedback. Andersen *et al.* highlight the disparities in abilities to thrive in MOOCs due to how aligned a participant is with the lifeworld of the MOOC designers and allowances of the technology: “Discovering these divergences in cultural dispositions holds potential for learning how to create culturally sensitive MOOCs” (235). Sharma notes that instructors and designers can draw on best practices of intercultural communication in teaching for their work, and he calls for more understanding on how diverse students participate and learn in online environments.

### **Writing MOOCs**

During the 2012 rise in MOOCs, the Gates Foundation announced that they would award grants to US institutions of higher education to develop MOOCs for general and developmental courses. Three of the successful applicants were for writing-oriented courses: first-year composition MOOCs by the Georgia Institute of Technology and by Duke University, and a second-level writing course by The Ohio State University. A fourth grant was awarded to Mount Saint Jacinto College for a developmental college writing course. All four writing MOOCs were hosted on Coursera.



As with MOOCs generally, these writing MOOCs were affected by the open, massive characteristics of these spaces, and they adjusted accordingly. Some aspects of writing pedagogy posed greater challenges than others when moving to a massive, open, online system. The content of a writing course – rhetorical terms, techniques for addressing audience, practices for revision and editing – could be provided via video presentations, lectures, and readings. The production and organization of such materials generally took more investment than a face-to-face, on campus class might, but conceptually they were congruent with such course formats. On the other hand, pedagogical approaches to writing practice and feedback required rethinking in the face of tens of thousands of participants: no instructor would be able to personally guide the participants in ways they would in non-MOOC writing courses (Head, Hesse, Halasek *et al*). Hesse outlined three potential approaches to the feedback conundrum: hire an army of teaching assistants, use machine-scoring, or rely on crowdsourcing through peer feedback. The three writing MOOCs worked with the latter.

Each of the three writing courses ran between ten and thirteen weeks, and over that time the participants completed a number of writing and composing assignments of different types. Each assignment on the MOOCs had an explanation of the assignment and associated content such as materials relating to rhetorical concepts and concerns that the participants would be practicing. For example, the OSU rhetorical composing MOOC had a video lecture for each major assignment that walked participants through its various components (Halasek *et al* 158). There were links to readings, videos, and other resources connected to composing concepts important for that assignment. The MOOCs had discussion board opportunities for participants to be interact with each other and, at times, with the instructors and teaching assistants. For example, the OSU MOOC had discussion forums on which participants could ask questions,

forums on which they could brainstorm topics and share ideas, and forums which had specific prompts that asked participants to try out different angles and approaches to the assignments (McCorkle *et al* 55). Once participants drafted a formal assignment, they would submit it for peer review. Each MOOC had a process of peer review that involved overall guidance for reviewing as well as specific rubrics tailored to each assignment. Participants would both give and receive reviews, and then revise their own work. Each MOOC had a slightly different system for peer review. For example, the OSU MOOC invested significantly to create its own writing exchange for online peer reviews. In it, participants had to give several reviews before being able to see reviewers' feedback on their own work. They were also able to comment on the usefulness of the peer review feedback, which the reviewers would be able to see. To receive a certificate of completion for these writing MOOCs, participants had to complete all of the formal assignments and their peer reviews. In sum, these writing MOOCs had content in the forms of video presentations and lectures, and links to online readings and resources. They connected their participants through discussion forums and peer review, which took a central position as the main means by which participants could assess their own progress in the course as they completed the several formal composing assignments required for the MOOC (Bloch, Comer and White; Halasek, *et al.*; Head, Hesse, McCorkle *et al.*).

The low completion rates noted earlier held true for these writing MOOCs: For Duke, 82,820 enrolled, 1,289 earned a Statement of Accomplishment (Comer and White 320); for the Georgia Institute of Technology writing MOOC in 2013, 21,932 enrolled, 238 received a completion certificate (Head); at The Ohio State University writing MOOC in 2013, over 32,000 enrolled, of which 1,182 completed the second assignment (Halasek *et al.* 161). Halasek *et al.* examined the completion rate in light of pedagogical assumptions they made about the course: as

the majority of the participants were not degree-seeking students but rather degree-holders and professionals, and as these participants enrolled in the course for a wide variety of reasons, it stood to reason that they took part in the course in ways that suited their own needs rather than following a path set out for them. That is to say that participants might undertake several, but not all of the formal writing assignments in the MOOC. For example, they might have gone through drafting and review with the first couple of assignments, fulfilled their own goals for enrolling in the MOOC that way, and thus not finished the final steps for completion.

Another aspect of the massive nature MOOCs that directly affected these writing instruction spaces was the interaction between faculty and participants. As Hesse notes, writing involves less knowing about writing and more on practice and feedback, yet because of the “massive” aspect of these spaces, feedback becomes complicated. Thus, the main way for MOOC participants to receive feedback is through peer review, but that feedback is not expert although it is still useful (Hesse). In essence, feedback on writing was crowdsourced and, as with peer review practices generally, training for the reviewers was important and became an important investment for these writing MOOCs (Bloch 168, Halasek *et al.*, Hesse). In addition to the structure of peer review, discussion forum structure has been found to be one of the factors essential to the success of a writing MOOC, particularly for global participants (Gilliland, Oyama, and Stacey). The discussion forums were not only spaces for increased writing practice, but they also were places where “participants solved one another’s problems and answered on another’s questions with an alacrity and care at which we marveled,” writes Halasek *et al* (160) as she and her team contemplate how their beliefs about teaching, specifically the role of the instructor, changed in the face of thousands of participants on their MOOC.

A third effect of the massive number of participants that impacted these writing MOOCs, and the one that is the most important for this study, is the type of participants, particularly the globally and linguistically diverse nature of the enrollees. As with MOOCs on other topics, almost three quarters of the participants who enrolled in the OSU Rhetorical Writing MOOC were from locations outside the United States, and a similar amount reported English as an additional language. One of the attractions for writing MOOCs for global writers whose home tongue is not English lies in the fact that often EFL courses abroad pay scant attention to writing, as Gilliland, Oyama, and Stacey note in their examination of a second language academic writing MOOC, stating that “...aspiring writers living far from [an American university] campus have limited opportunities to learn how to write for academic purposes. Many students for whom English is a second or foreign language want to learn more about these writing practices from their home countries.” For such global participants, the opportunities to engage with a community around writing, to share their work, and to get feedback gain insight from readers can be of unique importance: “though all writers benefit from a community, [second language] writers living in countries with few opportunities to share their English writing with others may benefit even more from such interaction as they can receive feedback on their language and rhetorical development” (Gililand, Oyama, and Stacey). While MOOCs generally enrolled high proportions of students from outside the US, the writing courses offered participants valuable chances for expanding their understandings about their writing in English and insights into how readers responded to it.

The presence of global participants meant that the participants had a more heterogeneous motivation, writing ability, and English-language background than in typical US writing courses with which the three academic writing MOOC teams were most familiar. In his analysis of the

early iterations of these courses, Bloch emphasizes how in light of the fact that they “attracted participants from various additional backgrounds and geographical areas, both the teachers and students have had to continually renegotiate the original goals, both within the constraints of the platform and in response to the goals of the participants” (Bloch 167). Each of the courses made some changes in light of these diverse participants. The Duke MOOC added an ESL specialist in a short video to discuss the role of grammar in the course; the Georgia Tech course modified some of the assignments in light of technical access difficulties participants from some parts of the world encountered; The Ohio State University added an early course unit on World Englishes and included information from that unit in peer review guidance (Bloch 167. McCorkle *et al.* 56-7). For the latter, the OSU MOOC team explained that

initiating a World Englishes conversation and making these changes was an attempt to bring about increased awareness and understanding among MOOC participants about the complexities of multilingual learning and communication. Also, we hoped that broaching the topic might help create a greater sense of community through knowledge building and exchange. (McCorkle *et al.* 57)

Another example of the type of modification the OSU MOOC made in light of the enrollees’ demographics was to identify them as “writers” instead of as “students,” for the latter did not adequately fit the participants’ vast ranges in age, professional position, degree-holding status, or motivations for enrolling (Halasek *et al.* 158).

These adjustments to the MOOCs had not been in their original plans. While at the outset of this academic writing MOOC endeavor Comer, of Duke’s MOOC, said she was inspired by “the prospect of designing a first-year writing MOOC as an opportunity to cultivate conversations about writing among learners around the world” (Comer and White 320), to a

large degree these MOOCs had not considered the large numbers of globally and linguistically diverse participants as they developed these spaces. The three Gates-funded writing MOOCs were based on traditional US university level composition classes, primarily intended for native English speakers (Bloch 163), without anticipating what global access to the MOOC would mean to that base assumption, that, among other points, it would expose US composition's monolingual stance. Halasek *et al.* acknowledged the situation directly "we were struck by our own unexamined bias toward conventional collegiate teaching contexts...we had assumed a study body that mimicked our traditional student populations at OSU. We had not anticipated the people who enrolled in the Rhetorical Composing MOOC" (158). Confronting these biases through the MOOC may have useful lessons for composition spaces in US universities (including traditional face to face courses) spaces which continue to grapple with cultural and linguistic diversity (Bloch 172, Halasek *et al.*, Head).

### **MOOCs as Sites for ELF Research**

While MOOCs did not live up to the grandiose claims, they did proliferate and continue to evolve, both finding different niches and prompting conversations about pedagogy. With the millions of MOOC participants from all over the world participating in a variety of ways in these spaces, the MOOCs offer data for researchers interested not only in learning, but also in intercultural interaction.

For the site of this study, The Ohio State University's (OSU) Writing II: Rhetorical Composing MOOC, three quarters of the participants joined from outside of the United States, and the discussion forum area shows participation from many areas of the world. As the instructors of that MOOC describe, the discussion forums allowed the participants to share ideas and get feedback on writing in a space that not only featured a globally diverse audience but, as a

result of that diversity, also expanded participants' awareness of the potential audiences for their work; in that process, the MOOC allowed participants a greater understanding of those globally diverse audiences and the strategies that rhetors could use to reach them (McCorkle *et al.*, 60). The discussion forums also allowed for writerly conversations outside of the higher-stakes, peer review section of the MOOC. Unsurprisingly, the English that participants employed varied from US academic “standard” to what appears to be learner English, which is often characterized by the types of errors made by someone still acquiring the language. In the discussions, participants communicated across the varieties of English to “get it done.” Thus, these spaces can illustrate language variation global participants use, how they use linguistic resources, and how the varieties function in discourse related to learning and writing.

As an educational space, but not a graded class, the MOOC lies in an intriguing middle ground between school and non-school writing. The majority of the participants are not traditional university students; they have bachelor’s and master’s degrees; many are employed full time; their motives vary for enrolling in the English-language advanced writing course. The participants are generally fluent, well-educated, successful English language users from a variety of backgrounds in affluent parts of the world. Instead of multilingual writers being at the margins, they compromise the center of this space. As such, we can use the MOOC to examine how global practices of communication in varied Englishes are used online in an educational space connected to writing instruction. The aim here is to see how participants in the MOOC vary English in online composition spaces in order to further understand how such language variation can work in other OWI spaces. Such insights can inform instructors, particularly US composition instructors from monolingual backgrounds, so that when they see these kinds of variation among their global students, they may have a more nuanced understanding of that

variation and its uses in different online course areas (discussion boards versus final paper draft, for example) rather than have strong binary judgments of “right” or “wrong” Englishes and penalizing all instances of language that does not fit what they perceive as correct. Indeed, research into global English has documented not only geographic and domain-specific variations in English around the world, it has also investigated how participants adapt their communicative behaviors and negotiate for understanding across variations.

Writing MOOCs are a rich source for examining these interactions. Comer and White, writing from their experiences with the Duke writing MOOC, call attention to this possibility broadly

An experience with tens of thousands of writers from across the world yields numerous exciting possibilities to learn more about who writes and why, how we can or cannot teach writing to widely diverse populations, and how writing is valued and deployed across a range of cultural, demographic, geographic, and disciplinary contexts” (321)

More specifically, they call for further research on “interactions between ESL and non-ESL writers” and on “interactions between learners across linguistic and cultural backgrounds, including world Englishes” (345). The study in this dissertation focuses on such interactions with a goal of finding insights that can be used to help further evolution of US university writing courses that are equitable and effective for a global audience, including helping domestic US students develop important intercultural skills to write and work with diverse groups.



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

A research project involving second language writers faces challenges in situating itself across two disciplines—writing studies/composition and applied linguistics/TESOL with different epistemologies and research traditions (Matsuda, Silva and Leki). However, writings about transdisciplinary research asserts that “sharing a problem” is a productive bridge across such disciplinary divides (Leavey); for this work that shared concern is working with linguistically diverse students in US-based writing courses. Commonality can also be found in research methods used in both fields. Taking advantage of these commonalities, this project uses discourse analysis procedures to examine the interaction between linguistically diverse participants in The Ohio State University online writing MOOC.

The aims of discourse analysis in composition, as Barton asserts, is “to describe the conventions of language in context, thereby articulating the connections between the structure and function of language in use” (576, *emphases mine*). By examining discourse—language at and above the level of the sentence—we can observe how writers communicate through texts. For this project, such observations involve how writing course participants use English—how they vary the language structures, negotiate across variations, and possibly create conventions—in their communication with other participants generally and about course topics specifically in the context of an online writing education space with many global participants.

As noted before, ELF communication is highly contextual, and discourse analysis by its central aim acknowledges the contextual nature of texts and how the context influences conventions—whether by following, breaking, and/or developing new ones. US-based writing

classes have been treated often as monolingual spaces and struggled with issues of the multilingual realities students bring to the class (Matsuda “Myth”). In a writing instruction context in which linguistic and global diversity is the (at time unexpected) majority, we can observe how the diverse writers use, vary and negotiate their use of English in a US based writing instructional environment. A further examination of those practices can lead to understanding ways of helping students become adept online global communicators and instructors become informed participants in that process.

Barton has extensively examined the history and use of discourse analysis in composition (including comparing that field’s take on the method with that of linguistics in order to find places where each can build upon the other), and she articulates that “The object of study in discourse analysis in composition studies is the connections between texts and contexts, with a focus on the repeated use of linguistic features ... and the associated conventions that establish their meaning and significance in in context” (“Resources” 586). Making observations about language use through discourse analysis typically involves both quantitative and qualitative moves; discourse analysis identifies repeated instances of language use features and describes them with plausible interpretation of their use in context. Indeed, as ELF research evolved from its focus on language features to the functional use of them, researchers found “close examination at the level of discourse of each discrete form being studied is necessary in order to ascertain functional/semantic properties and fully appreciate the relevance of a given form” (Jenkins, Cogo and Dewey, 291). The description of a form in a given context is the basis for interpreting—even theorizing, as Barton describes (“Linguistics” 95) —the work that form does in a given context.

In order to do this work of categorizing and interpreting, the method for the study began by identifying features of the language use and proceed through making interpretations about the strategies these features perform and the attitudes they evince. While the intention in this work was to quantify the findings, the small number of examples for each code did not support that work. As those results still illustrated features that instructors of US-based writing courses that they encounter and vocalize concerns about as they work with globally and linguistically diverse classes, this study connected those illustrative data to answer the questions for this study:

- What features of English language variations (that some may consider errors) do participants use when discussing writing in an instructional space? How do participants respond to such variations?
- What accommodation and negotiation strategies do globally diverse English language users employ in their interactions in a writing education environment? How is miscommunication treated and/or resolved?
- What attitudes do participants demonstrate toward language change and variation in their interactions about writing?

### **Site and Participants**

The data for this study comes from the discussion forum areas of the first session of the The Ohio State University's Writing II: Rhetorical Composing MOOC, hosted by the online platform Coursera in 2013. Participants could earn a certificate of completion by completing a series of writing and multimodal assignments—such as a visual argument and a researched argument—and submitting peer reviews for those assignments. In support of and in addition to those assignments, the MOOC presented textual and video content on rhetorical theory and analysis. Participants could use MOOC discussion forums to discuss that content and share ideas

and preliminary drafts of their assignments before submitting them (Halasek *et al.*). The discussion forums in this MOOC ranged in topic from the social to the academic, from self-introductions to conversations about the assignments. Participation on the boards was optional (not a requirement for completing the course), yet while not everyone who signed up for the MOOC participated on the boards, the boards were active spaces. At times the MOOC leaders and designated student leaders participated in these discussions by initiating some threads, answering questions, and adding comments.

The participants who signed up for this MOOC represented a wide array of backgrounds in terms of linguistic and cultural diversity. According to the 3,460 participants (of the nearly 33,000 who enrolled) who completed the demographic survey, the 2013 Rhetorical Composing MOOC had participants geographically located in 137 countries with a higher percent from outside of North America (78%) than the average for Coursera (72%). In terms of English proficiency (see table 1), fewer than half of those participants reported being a native English speaker or equivalent, almost an equal amount reported speaking English enough for most

Table 1: English Proficiency of 2013 Participants in Writing II: Rhetorical Composing MOOC<sup>3</sup>

English Proficiency (self-reported)	no.	percent
Native English Speaker or Equivalent	1667	46%
Sufficient for most situations	1556	43%
Sufficient for limited situations	232	6%
Blank	185	5%

Source: Coursera

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<sup>3</sup> Based on the demographic survey; 3,460 of the nearly 33,000 (10%) of the participants submitted the survey.

situations, and a minority assessed their English ability as limited or did not answer that question. This profile of participants who submitted the demographic survey indicates that overall they are, or consider themselves, quite fluent in English. This course is not an intermediate English as a foreign language writing class; it is a group of global English users coming together to focus on writing in practice and discussion as opposed to treating writing as a mode of language acquisition. As such, their interactions can show how ELF operates in discussions around writing and in writing instructional environments.

It is worth noting two caveats to these participant descriptions. First, participants self-reported, and with no detailed guidelines to those descriptors, they may under- or overestimate their abilities. Gililand, Oyama, and Stacey have observed that MOOC design generally assumes that participants can listen, read, and write competently enough in the language of delivery to succeed independently with university-level tasks. In the Coursera-listed requirements for this course, competency in English was listed, and, as noted above, most of the enrollees felt their language ability suited the course.

Second, MOOC participants vary widely in their engagement with such educational spaces: some are very active in all of the required activities and take advantage of additional opportunities for engagement such as the discussion forums; others may have signed up and then not participated at all. As the OSU MOOC team themselves describe this interaction, while many participants

were active in the course in some way (i.e., accessing instructional materials on the Coursera course website), many others were observing the course as educators interested in MOOCs but did not assume the role of student; other participants were clearly reading or watching the course materials but not posting their written essays for review; others

completed the writing assignments and selected individualized sets of enrichment materials provided by Bedford-St. Martins and Joe Moxley's open-source textbook Writing Commons. Still other participants avoided the enrichment materials and turned the discussion forums or the Google + community into their own reviewing community. (Halasek, *et al.* 161)

This varied degree of engagement with the different spaces on the MOOC means that while most of those who enrolled claim English as a non-native language, that does not mean that discussion in spaces were dominated by non-US, non-native-English speakers. However, the discussion forums for Rhetorical Composing clearly involve a variety of international participants across the more than six thousand threads, so even if not everyone posts in discussion, the forums show interaction among global participants. In terms of self-reported proficiency, the aim of the project is to describe how users vary English for their interactions, not to compare that use to a standard measure of language proficiency. Thus, while these caveats are notable, they would not preclude using this data to answer the central questions of this project proposal.

## **Method**

This study follows Huckin's six-step procedure for inductive discourse analysis in composition, with particular attention to language use in context, in composition as outlined in Kirsch and Sullivan's *Methods and Methodology in Composition Research*. Huckins lays out a formal sequence of steps that include initial wide analysis of a smaller preliminary data set, selection of specific items to examine in the full data set, through analysis of the results. The remainder of this chapter narrates my process through those six steps. As the texts for this study occur in an online environment, I consulted Myers's *The Discourse of Blogs and Wikis*, which

gives guidance for examining language and discourse in online spaces. Myers's work argues that analyzing digital discourse allows for uncovering aspects of language in a rapidly evolving arena that might not be apparent/not exist in more stable and mediated texts such as newspaper articles (4). Throughout the coding process, I consulted Saldaña's *Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*.

**Selection of an initial data set** The Rhetorical Composing discussion forums used for this study represent two main types of forums: a forum that discusses one of the rhetorical content areas of the MOOC, and a second forum that discusses ideas and preliminary work leading toward one of the formal assignments of the MOOC. This initial collection fulfills the two criteria for selection that Huckin recommends: they are of interest to the intended readers of the research, and they stimulate an intuitive sense to the researcher that they contain features of significance (90). For composition scholars and practitioners, these texts show how global English speakers interact regarding both content and process aspects of composition. For ELF scholars, these texts can build on the body of scholarship in their field about English language variation and communication by adding the context of US-based writing instruction environments. Based not only on my intuition about English language variation but also upon my knowledge of the field and upon my practical work in a university writing program, I chose these texts with a sense that there would be negotiation across language differences in both content and process areas, and that negotiation would reveal language features, strategies, and attitudes in the use of English with a global audience.

My selection of discussion areas was based on topic—two different kinds of topics common in composition instructional environments—and on the number of posts—sufficient so

that if the initial analysis showed fruitful avenues of discussion that a further analysis could be made. For the initial analysis, I chose the first 75 posts from each thread.

For the course content discussion, I chose the “ethos” thread under the “Rhetoric 101” forum. The “Rhetoric 101” forum threads relate to concepts such as *kairos*, *audience*, and *pathos*. I examined the “ethos” thread for preliminary analysis because it was the most active, accounting for more than a quarter of the 425 total original posts in the “Rhetoric 101” forum. The thread asked participants to write in response to a video about the rhetorical concept; the video discussed *ethos* and then the participants wrote about their own authority and expertise. The activity on this discussion thread took place mainly over four weeks in the second month of the MOOC.

For data concerning discussion of participants’ writing process, I chose an active forum in which participants discussed their work. The “Activity 6.1” discussion forum was a place that participants could put forward an idea for their researched argument assignment and crowdsource feedback on that idea. The researched argument was the final required assignment, and thus the discussions in this forum represents the communication of participants who had persisted in the MOOC and had been communicating with this international audience for several weeks.

**Identification of salient patterns** Using the qualitative data analysis computer software package NVivo, I examined the initial set of posts using a balance of pre-determined and emerging codes. Huckin recommends scanning the texts holistically, looking for general patterns at this initial stage (90-1). Meyers describes working from a list of categories and marking when each appeared, expanding and contracting categories as needed (161), a first-round coding practice that Saldaña labels as the provisional method. In this study, I examined seventy-five



posts from each of the discussion areas and coded them in terms of characteristics of ELF communication that have been previously identified in the literature (see table 2 for a summary list, see Appendix A for definitions and examples) while still remaining alert for other patterns in the sample data that may not yet appear in the existing ELF research. NVivo allowed me to record my codes, search for recurrence of some of the features, and collect my observations in notes.

During this initial analysis, I noticed how participants often referred to language in their posts and began to code that feature LANG. I also added the code LOC for mentions of location; these mentions seemed to be a way for participants to not only situate themselves globally but to also call attention to the geographical situation from which some expertise stemmed, a potential area for future analysis.

Table 2: Codes for Initial Analysis (based on previous ELF research)

Language variation	Communicative negotiation
LEXI - Lexical variations GRAM - Grammatical variations IDIOM - Idiomaticity MULM - Multimodal resources	REO - Rephrasing – other rephrasing RES - Rephrasing: self rephrasing COC - Co constructions REQ - Requesting moves
<i>Emergent codes</i> <i>LANG</i> <i>LOC</i>	

**A determination of “interestingness”** (Barton would call them “rich features”) After the initial coding, I examined the results to determine which codes showed patterns of data useful for answering the research questions about features, strategies, and attitudes about global English

people used to discuss rhetoric and writing in an online environment. Huckin emphasizes that choosing items for further investigation relies on knowing the field and its current directions in order to examine the data for “something that is perceived as both *useful* to theory building or pedagogy and *original*” (91). In Barton’s description of inductive discourse analysis, she describes such “something” as “rich features,” meaning that the items chosen for investigation have both linguistic integrity and contextual value, by which Barton means that the features are used frequently or noticeably throughout the data and that they are important for creating and maintaining meaning in context (“Inductive” 24). This stage of investigation revealed that some features important in ELF and online discourse emerged as absent from the discussion forum data (REQ, RES, REO, COC, MULM), yet others were not only present but appeared promising for future analysis (GRAM, LEXI, IDIOM, LANG). These codes and decisions are discussed below.

Results in terms of the language variation codes LEXI and GRAM abounded: word forms, sentence structures, verb inflections, missing auxiliary verbs, and more. I decided to chose a selection of features to discuss in depth, using my experience discussing variations with writing instructors and my knowledge of ELF research to determine “interestingness” under lexico-grammatical variations: articles, prepositions and particles, the plural noun form *researches*, and the generalized use of the verb *make*. These four features not only showed variation across the discussion forums, they also compare to trends at work in ELF. While the variations did not seem to cause miscommunication and replies to posts proceeded without comment on these features, these variations are readily noticeable and commented on by participants, including instructors, in writing classes (Zamel; Zawacki and Habib 185-7) and thus are a “rich feature” worthy of further exploration.

The preliminary examination of idiomaticity (IDIOM) showed that participants used idioms throughout the discussion boards, and that participants called various levels of attention to the idioms through such devices as italics and quotations. Research on idioms, including those studies investigating idioms in ELF, has called attention to the presence of these phrases since they tend to rely on cultural understandings for meanings and so can cause problems when communicating with a culturally diverse group (Carey “Hard to Ignore” 92, Seidlhofer “Research” 220, Simpson and Mendis 437). Specialists in cross-cultural communication generally advise that such figures of speech be avoided, yet idioms are a noticeable feature of the discussion forum data; using such culturally-dependent language features would seem to demonstrate a lack of accommodation to the global audience. Thus, idioms deserved further investigation for this study in order to examine how they are used, varied, and affect communication.

At this point in the preliminary analysis, a problem in the definition of the initial coding scheme arose: *idioms* and *idiomaticity* are not synonymous terms, although the former can be categorized as a subset of the latter. On a general level, *idiomaticity* describes native-like expression involving knowledge beyond vocabulary and syntax (Warren 35); for example, phrases such as “she ascended the horse” and “commit killing” make sense, but native speakers would not use those combinations and instead substitute “*mounted* the horse” and “commit *murder*.” When describing unidiomatic expressions in ESL instruction, examples often focus on use of prepositions, such as “she mentioned *about* the problem” and “they disagree *against* your view.” Overall, idiomaticity involves restrictions in the combination of language units. These restricted combinations arise from habitual use by a community in a given context; over time, such uses become more or less fixed (Warren 36). The combinations can be more or less

restrictive, with the most restrictive, and frequently opaque, expressions falling under the category of idioms (Warren 44-5, Wuff 11-12).

Using a broad definition of idiomaticity in ELF research would be inappropriate given that ELF de-centers the native speaker as the model for global communication in English. On the other hand, examining how using the most restrictive, opaque phrases can affect communication does fit in the ELF paradigm. Indeed, work in ELF has called attention to “unilateral idiomaticity” as an issue in global communication in English. That is, when speakers—usually referring to native speakers—use expressions that rely on specific cultural knowledge for meaning (Seidlhofer, “Research” 220). When participants employ such culture-specific expressions in a culturally diverse context, such as this MOOC space with participants from across the globe, the idioms may introduce communication breakdowns or alienating discourse. Thus, while initial coding for idiomaticity in this study focused on a narrow definition of the term, that of more opaque idioms, that focus is appropriate given the previous scholarship and the problematic nature of such expressions in global English communication, also as identified in ELF research.

Once having determined that this subset of idiomaticity, idioms, is a feature worth investigating, further complications arise in terms of defining this category for coding. Idioms are generally considered a subset of the category of formulaic language (Simpson and Mendis 422; Wray and Perkins) in that they have fixed lexical and grammatical structures (Crystal via Carey 92). Idioms further are characterized in that the meaning of the phrase cannot be deduced from the meaning of the individual words (Crystal via Carey 92). Thus, a general definition of an idiom is “a group of words that occur in a more or less fixed phrase and whose overall meaning cannot be predicted by analyzing the meanings of its constituent parts” (Simpson and Mendis

423). The boundary between what is and what is not an idiom is not an exact one: idioms may be defined broadly such that they also include phrasal verbs (e.g., *to wrap up* in the phrase *to wrap up a discussion*) or strictly to include only longer, opaque multi-word phrases (e.g., *kick the bucket*). While the general definition states that idioms are usually categorized as non-compositional (opaque; the meaning of the whole cannot be determined by the meanings of the individual words) and relatively fixed, research has shown that compositionality is a gradient based on an individual's judgement, that analysis of underlying metaphors reveal more decomposability than first apparent, and that variation of these "fixed" phrases is accepted and not uncommon (Zyzik 414-5). Dictionaries of idioms do not explain their methods for collecting their entries, and pedagogical materials rely on developer intuition and intention (Liu 672, 679; Simpson and Mendis 423). Thus, "what constitutes an idiom is often a decision at the discretion of the researcher" (Liu 672). In light of these discussions, my definition of idioms for the data in this study focused on three criteria: a (1) multi-word phrase that is (2) relatively fixed, (2) institutionalized, and (4) opaque in meaning<sup>4</sup>. In taking a narrow definition of idiom, I excluded phrasal verbs. These four criteria were refined through several rounds of coding, which took place as described below under "verification of the pattern."

The final feature that yielded preliminary results indicating potential for further study was participants' mention of language (LANG), either in general or a specific language, most often English. References to the power of language, of one's expertise in a language, and to attitudes

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<sup>4</sup> As noted from the research on idioms discussed earlier, quality of opacity is complex and often relies on judgement calls of the researcher; as Simpson and Mendis qualify "the boundary between the opaque, idiomatic meaning of a fixed expression and its transparent, more literal meaning is often blurred" (424). For use in this study, I used both my own determination as well as institutionalized references to help determine this quality.

about language—including grammar and variation—arise frequently enough to indicate fruitful potential to answer this study’s research questions, particularly in terms of attitudes towards global English.

Several of the preliminary codes dropped from the study at this point (REQ, RES, REO, COC, MULM) due to either the absence of the feature in the data or a lack of “interestingness” and relevance to the study’s main questions. The preliminary analysis revealed a dearth of the communicative negotiation moves that had been emphasized in previous ELF research. The initial coding revealed some examples of requesting moves (REQ), but the requests were related to content of the writing rather than that of clarification of meaning across English variations (for example, “do you have to buy in bulk? Would people be able to afford to buy in bulk if that’s the case?” rather than “what do you mean when you wrote ....?”). The initial analysis revealed few instances that could be coded as rephrasing or co-constructions (RES, REO, COC). It may be that the mode of communication affected these results: written posts allow participants to pause in their construction of their turn or to rephrase before posting. Thus, for example, the pause that might occur in oral communication indicating a search for words that could prompt a co-construction is absent, or it happens and is resolved before the post is published. The absence of communicative negotiation moves made this area of the data less fruitful for further investigation.

Since the data from the discussion boards was obtained as a text file, multimodal features (MULM) such as images, videos, and links did not transfer. Thus, this feature also did not yield results for further study. While this change cut off one avenue of investigation, it did not cripple the overall investigation. In his study of blogs, Meyers called attention to the value of examining language in online discourse:

...there is a tendency in studies of new media to play up the visual and aural elements and to treat writing as, well, old. But despite all the possibilities open to bloggers for inclusions of pictures, sound and video, written language remains central to most blogs.... By studying language, we can take a step back [or perhaps a step closer] and look intensely at how they say things, as well as what they say. ... Also, blogs and wikis lead out from linguistic issues to wider issues about the use of language in society. Among these issues are the ways we use language to locate ourselves, to state fact, to argue and to define ourselves in relation to other people. (4)

While multimodal features are frequently used in online communicative spaces—and, indeed, were used in this MOOC space—examining the use of word choice, language variation, and other language features that participants use in their discussion forum communication allows for analyses most connected to how they vary and work across the variation in their communication, thus most closely connected to the research questions of this study regarding global English use.

The final preliminary code dropped in further analysis was location (LOC). While reference to participants' location stood out as a feature of the discussion forums in analysis of the preliminary set of posts, participants appear to use location to give insight into attitudes and experiences about topics not related to language. For example, as a participant discussed writing a paper about sustainably-produced meat, other participants noted what meat production and consumption was like in their part of the world. Where location did connect closely to language, the utterance was already coded under LANG.

Thus, after the initial analysis, four main codes remained, three of which had sub codes attached (see Table 3 for list; see Appendix A for details and examples).

Table 3: Codes for Analysis (based on initial analysis)

Language variation	Topic
LEXI - Lexical variations RESEARCHES MAKE  GRAM - Grammatical variations ART - article PREP - preposition/particle  IDIOM - Idioms	LANG - mention of language ENG - English

**Selection of a study data set** As the initial analysis of posts in the two discussion areas demonstrated fruitful features for this study, for the data set I decided to use the entirety of the two discussion forums. With both original posts and their replies, there were 280 posts in the *ethos* thread for a total of 35,769 words. The average length of posts was 128 words. One hundred thirty-one participants posted an average of twice each; of the participants, 90 posted once, 39 posted between two and ten times, and the remaining 3 posted more than ten and up to twenty-three times. The *Activity 6.1* forum held 175 posts with a total of 23,946 words. The shortest post had four words, the longest had just over a thousand words, and the average length of the posts was 136 words. Of the posts, 106 were under one hundred words, 66 posts ranged from a hundred to seven hundred words, and the remaining 3, which received no replies, were over eight hundred words. Forty-four participants posted an average of four times each, mainly over a two-week period.

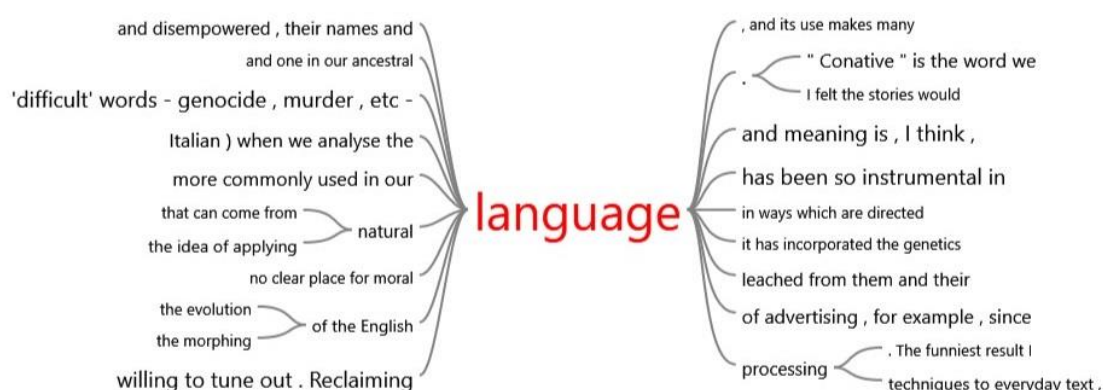
**Verification of the pattern** Determining how these features of interest (from the fourth step) repeated throughout the discussion forum posts (from the fifth step) took place in two stages. In the first stage, I repeated the process from the preliminary analysis: I read through the



threads and coded manually, this time according to the revised set of codes developed from the initial analysis (see Table 3, Appendix A). As noted earlier in this chapter, the data under each code appeared insufficient to claim a strong trend, so my analysis from this point considered all of the data under each code from which to make observations, interpretations, and connections to ELF research. While these findings cannot be said to be verified patterns, they are observable examples of features that instructors of US-based writing courses encounter.

For the second stage, I used NVivo's text functions to search for particular words and phrases related to the LANG and IDIOM codes, examining text lines and word trees (see figure 2) for results that should also be coded. For example, I searched for "language" to identify places

Figure 1: NVivo word tree for *language* in the discussion forum Activity 6.1



where participants discussed language generally but that I might have missed in the previous two rounds of coding. I repeated this process for "English." In each case, I followed the instance back to its full form in an original post or reply.

Verifying the pattern of idioms took place across these two steps in this way: First, I manually coded each possible idiom by reading through all of the discussion forum posts and

replies in the data set. For each item identified as a potential idiom, I checked the institutionalization of the phrase by consulting the *Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms* (Ayto) and *A Dictionary of American Idioms* (Makkai, Boatner, and Gates). This check resulted in the exclusion of uninstitutionalized phrases such as “help vampire” as well as the exclusion of items such as similes and metaphorical language that I may have initially misidentified.<sup>5</sup> The second step in coding idioms involved using NVivo to search for key words from the idioms previously found in my rounds of manual coding. For example, I used NVivo to search the forums for “neck” from “stuck your neck out” to confirm I had found all repeated occurrences of that particular idiom. In addition, I consulted researched lists of idioms found in academic contexts and searched for key words from those idioms: Simpson and Mendis’s list of idioms found four or more times in MICASE, a corpus of US academic oral language, as well as their recommended list of idioms that would be useful for instruction in an English for Academic Purposes course. In all cases, I manually examined NVivo’s results in order to include or exclude non-idiom uses of the key words (e.g., “my neck is sore from all this computer work.”)

Across these two steps, I tested the quality of fixedness of the idiom, including or excluding phrases based on how closely the meaning and the wording of the variation matched with the fixed, institutionalized form. For example, in the phrase “a translator is someone who is eager to put on the shoes of another person” has both semantic and lexical similarity to the institutionalized idiom “to be in another person’s shoes,” so the variation is included in results.

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<sup>5</sup> I made two exclusions to this institutionalization criteria, both of which fit the other three criteria: I argue that “to go down a rabbit hole” is moving from a figurative literary reference into institutionalized idiomatic use and its use in context in this data makes is relevant to composition discourse, and “walk on the wild side” appears more than once in the dataset and is also used aside from referencing its origin in a song lyric.

On the other hand, “throw in a crazy grenade” has a similar meaning to the idiom “wreck havoc” but as the former phrase does not share similar wording, it was excluded from results.

**Analysis** The final step Huckin proposes involves taking the established patterns observed in previous steps, examining them from different perspectives, and interpreting them honestly (92). While a detailed discussion of the results and analysis is the purpose of the following chapters, the results gathered up to this stage went through a preliminary round of analysis before going deeper into a fuller interpretation. Through this preliminary round, I connected the results to the research questions for this study.

The first research question seeks to examine the features of English language variation that participants use writing in an instructional space, and the data under the code GRAM illustrated such features and responses to them. The grammatical variations in the data showed numerous examples of articles, prepositions, and particles used in ways that deviated from native-speaker norms, including instances where the item was unnecessary, missing, or a different item was used. The data also showed numerous instances of *researches* treated as a plural noun, a variation from native speaker norms which treats the word as a non-count noun. As academic writing calls upon writers to draw upon others’ research in their work, the word is frequently used in academic writing instruction and worthy of further examination. Another lexico-grammatical variation that appeared in this preliminary analysis was the not-infrequent use of *make* in expressions that varied from native speaker norms. This variation has been noted in ELF research as an example of overgeneralization of certain verbs. In terms of response, as noted before, these variations provoked little if any overt reaction from the other participants.

Analysis of the idioms in the data revealed strategies participants used in their interactions with globally diverse English language users in this MOOC writing education

environment, thus addressing the second research question for this study. The data showed that the idioms could be organized according to how they were used, for example whether attention was brought to them through italics or quotation marks, whether additional explanation was given to aid meaning, whether an idiom was repeated in responses, and what function the idiom served in the discourse. In this way, participants appeared to operate on a continuum of awareness of how culturally-centered language affects communication with global audience. In many cases the participants' actions accommodated their interlocutors' understanding of the idioms and thus illuminated strategies globally diverse English language users employ in this writing education space.

The final research question in this study asks about the attitudes that participants demonstrated toward ELF in their interactions about writing. In the coded data, mentions of language on the forums allowed analysis of how participants represented English in their language repertoire, how they used language to call attention to their own expertise, and what attitudes they held about grammar and variation. As the last theme connected closely to the research questions for this study, the mentions for the first two categories were dropped from further analysis. Examination of items coded for LANG specifically in light of the research questions for this study showed understanding on variation on the levels of the English language as a whole, as connected to national and cultural groups, and as a feature of individual idiolects. While participants at times called overt attention to standard language beliefs, those discussions also mentioned a place and value for language variation.

Each of the following three chapters discusses the results and analyses in detail. Chapter four examines attitudes toward English language variation in participants' explicit mention of language, and chapter five examines the accommodation and negotiation moves participants use

when employing idioms in the discourse. Chapter six puts the lexico-grammatical variations in the data in conversation with ELF research on articles, prepositions, particles, countable nouns (through discussion of *research*), and generalization of verbs (through discussion of *make*).

## CHAPTER 4

### LANGUAGE ATTITUDES AND EXPERTISE

#### **Introduction**

This and the following two chapters will present and discuss the results of this study in light of each of the three research questions. Chapter 5 will discuss the strategies participants used to navigate idioms, and chapter 6 will delve into lexico-grammatical variations of the posts on the forums. This chapter will discuss the views towards global English that the participants showed on the discussion forums of this MOOC to answer the research question “What attitudes do participants demonstrate toward language change and variation in their interactions about writing?”

Attitudes refer to favorable or unfavorable views people hold about, in this case, language: “language attitudes can be defined as evaluative reactions to different language varieties” (Dragojevic). These evaluative reactions form the basis for judgements about others regarding such aspects as the other’s friendliness and intelligence with real world consequences as to how people treat each other based on language varieties and attitudes. As discussed in chapter 1, language attitudes can play a negative role in how writing instructors, and other students, perceive linguistically diverse student writers in their courses.

Research into attitudes, including linguistic attitudes, typically follows a tripartite view: cognitive (knowledge and beliefs about language), connotative (behaviors and responses to language varieties), and affective (feelings towards languages) (Dragojevic; O’Rourke and Hogan-Brun; Riagáin). These different areas are not exclusive and can combine to form a person’s opinion about a language, and in different situations one of the areas may be most salient in the moment in forming attitudes (Dragojevic). The data for this study gives insight into

the cognitive angle of participants' attitudes as they explicitly express their knowledge and beliefs about languages. Participants' word choices in the posts give some hints into the affective realm of language attitudes, but the connotative aspect of language attitudes toward English language variation is harder to establish here as responses to posts vary, with some posts getting several responses and many others none. Nonetheless, the cognitive and affective aspects of attitude evidenced in the data on the MOOC discussion forums illustrate important themes as regards to language variation.

Across the two discussion forums, participants' explicit mention of language—language in general and English specifically—shed the clearest light in the data on the question of the attitudes that participants demonstrate toward ELF. As noted in chapter 3, participants mention of language was a feature of the MOOC discussion forum posts and thus became an emergent code for analysis. References to language appeared much more on one of the two discussion forums than the other: language was mentioned almost five times more often in the discussion forum on *ethos* (29 mentions) than it was on the discussion forum on the activity (5 mentions). When language is mentioned, it often appears as a strategy to emphasize expertise, most often calling attention to the participant's status as a language teacher, translator, or other multilingual professional. This use is not surprising, given the nature of a MOOC and the language of instruction: MOOCs enroll participants from all over the world, and for many of them, English is an additional language so its position in their language repertoire becomes salient in an English-medium course. This also means that part of the participants' ethos in this course lies in their identity as an English-language user (as contrasted with a learner identity) with the degree of linguistic expertise able to participate in an English-medium, US (native speaker) based, rhetorical writing MOOC.

While the participants themselves do not use the term ELF across the two discussion forums, their comments about language variations show attitudes towards global English that acknowledge the flexibility and evolution of the language while at the same time grappling with ideals of correctness and standards. More specifically, participants acknowledged variation in terms of overall language evolution, regional varieties, and individual variation. While generally accepting of such variation, participants also expressed views that aligned with the myth of a single, international version of English and complained of contexts outside of the MOOC where variation was not tolerated. These themes, which often echo conversations in composition that discuss language variation in terms of resistance to monolingual ideologies, are discussed and illustrated below.

### **Global English Variation**

The prevailing attitudes toward ELF shown in participants' interactions show both an understanding of and tolerance toward global English variations along different themes: evolution of languages generally, national and cultural varieties of English use, and individual variation. While participants tend to treat global English variation within these themes with understanding and tolerance, at times their posts also allude to beliefs in a native-speaker ideal. Even with that latter struggle, the overall attitude toward English and its users is accepting, if not downright positive, toward efforts, variation, and global communication.

**English variation as language evolution** Participants resist static ideas about language as they recognize that English evolves through time and that evolution is a natural process of languages. This view of language runs contrary in large part to the idea of a correct standard toward which communication in the language should always strive. This single-standard ideal is linked to the belief that languages are static and thus variations are mistakes (McWhorter 40,



Watson and Shapiro). However, by acknowledging the fact that language change and evolve, participants in the MOOC highlight the place of variation not as errors but a regular practice. As Jenkins notes, “[b]ecause a living language is by definition dynamic, [prescriptive rules] are subject to change” (*World Englishes* 33). The acknowledgement of evolution indicates an accepting attitude toward global English variations. In the exchanges on the MOOC discussion forums, participants illustrate attitudes toward language variation as appropriate and powerful, not a devolution or faulty mutation of the language. In the two excerpts below, the participants highlight not only this evolving nature of the language but also how they respond to it. The first example is a post on the *ethos* discussion forum:

My name is [...]. I am an English teacher. I have a degree in English teaching of the Universidad de Guadalajara. I have the Certificate of Proficiency in English of the Cambridge University. I have the Certificate of Language Knowledge with one of the highest scores awarded in Mexico by the Secretaria de Educacion Publica. Besides the above, I have been teaching English for 37 years; this means that I have a great experience and a powerful passion for my work. I consider English a living being which evolves every day. So one of my daily routines is listening and reading to current news in all areas. I firmly believe that language is a tool so I teach students to use it as they judge fit.

In this post, the participant spends several lines establishing her authority in English before giving her consideration of English as “a living being which evolves every day.” She strongly supports how her understanding of English as changing, not static, is based on a well-educated and considered view. The participant incorporates her understanding of language evolution both in her own practices to keep up to date with the language and to teach her students. The latter view also alludes to individual variation in English language—students can use the language as they see fit for their needs—and this view is in line with the final theme in this section.

However, understanding that languages evolve is not confined to language specialists. In the following post, which is from the *Activity 6.1* thread, the participant presents their view of

language evolution as a personal one and one that connects to the power of languages to affect peoples' understandings of their surroundings.

I often consider that in the evolution of the English language it has incorporated the genetics of values which are an antithesis of that which might support a *worldfeel* that can underpin a new sets or new sets of values for human recovery.

It may be that in order to breathe anew we have to embrace a melange of other, softer heart-intelligent languages, or even accept the morphing of the English language in ways which are directed by the very audience for whom certain stories need telling. All over the world the young are evolving new ways of expressing themselves. We do the world a disservice to ignore these cadences of meaning that these evolutions/revolutions incorporate.

In this post, the participant uses terms such as *morphing*, *evolving*, and even *revolution* to call attention to the ways that English changes according to *audience*, *the young*, and *all over the world*. These expressions illustrate understanding of language changes over time and generations. After all, the English(es) of the 21st century is quite different from the English used by Chaucer or Shakespeare. At the same time, the latter post alludes to an attitude of resistance to the variable nature of English with the phrases *have to embrace* and *even accept the morphing*. At the same time, the post shows cognitive aspect of attitude through their declaration of their belief in language change while the word choices hint at possible negative feelings, an affect of some resistance, to that process. The mix of resistance to language change while acknowledging its existence and positive potential illustrates the complications of accepting language change.

These attitudes towards language change contrasts with what Watson and Shapiro call “Myth of Linguistic Uniformity, Stability, and Separateness,” one of the problematic monolingual ideologies in composition. This myth “imagines languages as whole and static codes with inherent structures that have been and will always be internal to a given language and its use” (Watson and Shaprio). These participants resist monolingual attitudes by expressing beliefs in the realities of language change.

Overall, however, the posts above focus on English as variable through time, not necessarily as variable in communities. That is to say that the participants, particularly the latter, treat English as a monolith, one that evolves through the years and generations, but they do not acknowledge how English can vary contemporaneously across different communities of language users.

**National and regional English language variation** While the comments above consider English as a whole, other comments set English variation to specific cultures and national communities. In these posts, participants recognize that communities use English differently; that is to say that the posts call attention to national and cultural varieties of English without ranking one variety over another. For example, in the section below, the data shows participants' acknowledgement of English language variation among different speakers in different cultural and national contexts.

The first excerpt shows this awareness of variation according to cultural contexts, questioning the idea of what makes a text "simple." In the original post on the *ethos* thread, the poster explains their work as an instructional designer (ID). In the course of that post, they describe how their work involves both material and presentation of that material: "As a ID my job is not just to make the learning content simple, but to present it in a way that makes its learning simple." One of the responders focuses in on the quality of simplicity; in that response, the participant recognizes English as a global language used by people from different cultures, and that different cultural audiences would react differently to different rhetorical premises. The participant draws attention to the need for people communicating to a global audience to question their own assumptions about communicative/rhetorical norms, even when using the same language.

I have one question. If one is assessing quality in any written/verbal endeavour and one is doing so in the English language, would one necessarily come up with conflicts in terms of both application and input with regard to different internal rhetorical content/approach arising within different cultural domains?

I hope I make sense here. I simply want to know what logical thread is followed in the course of establishing 'simplicity'?

This participant acknowledges that the quality of “simplicity” varies across different communities of English language users (Baker; Connor, Ene, and Traversa), and while the post makes a general connection to culture, it does not oversimplify the connection; it does not name a culture that ascribes to one approach and contrast it with another. Rather, the poster raises the question, treating the variation as something inherent instead of problematic, and calling attention to how global participants need to consider these questions and variations in their communication. Putting these ideas in the form of a question may be a face-saving move by this participant; in other words, the participant may be making a strong comment about considering global diversity when communicating in English, but they soften the comment with the question. Such face-saving negotiation has been shown to be a feature of ELF discourse, although in this case it may have not landed well because these questions are the last turn on this thread.

In addition to a general call to variation on a global, rhetorical level, participants drew attention to language variation at a local level: in this case *local* in both the sense of composition and geography: a word choice and a specific community. In the following exchange, the original poster and respondent discuss an English word and its use in different communities. This exchange is one of the only examples in which a participant interrupts the focus on the content of the initial post to ask about clarification of language specifically. Overall, the other posts on the discussion forums in this study proceed along with an attitude of “get it done” and “let it pass” noted in ELF studies: ELF research generally shows that participants attend to content over form in order to successfully accomplish the goals of the communication and that participants will let

non-understandings pass as long as they can proceed with the general goal of the interaction (Firth “Lingua Franca Factor” 155; Jenkins, Cogo & Dewey 293; also see chapter 6 for further discussion of “get it done” across variations). In the exchange below from *Activity 6.1* forum, the original poster asks a question about the assignment itself. The first responder asks about the word *conative* from the original post. The exchange about that term is confident and without a sense of deficit, noting that the word is commonly used in Italian English contexts. (The data below has excerpted much of the discussion about the assignment itself in order to focus on the topic of global English variation.)

Original Poster: Now, more seriously, there is something that I do not quite understand in this assignment. On one hand it seems that we have to proceed in line with the rhetorical appeal of the PSA "announcement" (even though we can change the topic): in "Activity 6.1: Brainstorming your Research Project", the example we are given is, again, a conative text, in the sense that the writer's aim is to "persuade an audience of high school students and their parents to consider having the student enroll in a physical education...". Whereas, in other examples, such as magazine articles, the aim is quite different in my opinion. There is an "argumentative" intention for sure, but not conative in the sense that the aim is not to induce the audience to "act", but only to inform, to suggest, to invite to reflect, etc.

Can somebody help me with this, please?

Responder: Hi R.... First of all, I would like to thank you for adding to my vocabulary. I had to look up "conative". I don't recall ever coming across it before yet it seems to be a very appropriate and descriptive word. Conation. Hmm. But I digress. I'm in the early phase of brainstorming for my own project. ....[notes own understanding of the assignment and parameters]

[MOOC leader enters, there is discussion related to the assignment parameters, then...]

OP: Thank you very much M...!

We ESL users often come up with unusual words which are maybe more commonly used in our language. "Conative" is the word we use (in Italian) when we analyse the language of advertising, for example, since its rhetorical appeal aims at luring consumers into buying something.

[thanks MOOC leader and confirms understanding]

The original poster calls attention to their position as a non-native English speaker without deficit attitudes that can often plague such a label (Jenkins, Cogo, and Dewey 308; Widdowson 361-2). The original poster presents English variation along national lines as appropriate, the responder treats the term in the same way. They call attention to the variation of the term and to the variation in the English used in different communities without evaluating one use as incorrect under another.

The original poster ties the use of specific lexical items, such as *conative*, to a national non-native English speaking community. Research into global English frequently investigates national or first language-influenced varieties of another language, often calling attention to novel lexical items. For example Fang notes *four modernisation* and *imperial examination* as expressions specific to Chinese English (20) much in the same way the exchange above attributes *conative* to an Italian English use. In both of these cases, the words can be found in general English dictionaries, but their use is not as generalized across English varieties and as such varies from much ENL discourse. The discussion of *conative* in terms of variation and community shows an attitude toward global English that recognizes and treats as legitimate “ESL” varieties.

In both examples, variation is treated as appropriate without deficit attitudes. The participants allude to how a language feature that may be assessed as wrong in one situation may actually be appropriate for a different situation and how the global participants on the MOOC need to be aware of that, especially when communicating in English.

**Individual variation** A third theme in participants’ attitudes of acceptance and understanding of English as a variable, not static, language comes from comments acknowledging individual variation. These positive views of variation show explicit recognition

of the importance of comprehensibility above a sense of a correct standard. Each of the examples below call attention to writing and how, especially in a global context, getting things done takes priority, a theme that often arises in ELF research (Firth “Lingua Franca Factor” 155; Jenkins, Cogo & Dewey 293) and is a theme for chapter 6 of this work. The examples further emphasize that variation from an ENL standard does not equate lack of authority, a point that links to the earlier example about *conative* as well.

As a learner of languages and instructor of English as a Second Language, I have been surprised by the number of people on this forum who can write and make themselves understood in it. By reading and analysing texts, I have come to the conclusion that it's not the quantity but quality that matters. Put simply, if I am able to write this paragraph in a language other than my own and you are able to read it and understand it, it stands to reason that we have put endless effort into it.

In this post, an English language expert asserts that comprehensibility is more important than correctness without labeling language variation as correct or incorrect. In the first sentence, they draw attention to the competency of the writers, implying that there can be considerable variation when writing in a “language other than [one’s] own.” At the end of the post, they emphasize the importance of understanding and communicating in writing, not the form of the language itself. The post above also acknowledges the effort that writing in multiple languages takes. This post appears to align with calls to re-examine the place of the reader in written communication, particularly in situations that involves linguistically diverse writers. In their exploration of the dimensions of monolingualism in composition, Watson and Shapiro explain the problematic monolingual ideology in which “Speakers of other varieties are assigned all responsibility for acquiring the so-called ‘shared’ dominant variety [of a language] and thus carry a much fuller burden for communication and for clarifying meaning (rather than communication being negotiated equally across interlocutors).”

The next example is the clearest expression of positive attitudes towards variation with its praise for the prose of the original post. The poster calls attention to variations from ENL in terms not of right or wrong but rather of effect of variations on an ENL reader. Whereas the previous example emphasizes the expertise of the poster and their reaction to other NNES writers, the example below explicitly endorses the ethos of the NNES participant who wrote the post to which they are responding: the previous example announced “my writing has expertise;” this post declares “you have language expertise.”

[M], this is beautiful English, surrounded by the sound of light, summery music, and smiles and joy. It is a place where double entendres can abide with no one beating you over the head for them!

What i am saying is that although the choice of English words in your paragraph above are put together in such a way that many native English speakers would cause a wry smile, they still convey a sense of pure and unadulterated ethos.

I hope you understand me!

This post conveys admiration for M’s writing in flowing praise with a bit of non-standard capitalization. The poster praises the effectiveness of M’s original post<sup>6</sup> and the emotional content it conveys. The final line could refer to the participant’s assessment of M’s language skills (deficit), or to the participant’s own ability to communicate internationally, as an invitation for further discussion, or a combination of all three. As with the previous example, this participant does not label variations in terms of correctness, yet they note that variations will strike some ENL readers as unusual. However, it explicitly states at the end that the post has clear authority that is—or should be—unaffected by variations from ENL norms. Overall, these posts that explicitly mention language represent a positive attitude toward global language variation.

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<sup>6</sup> Due to the format of the data received (a single, large, text file), it was not possible to locate the original post to which this example is responding. For some comments, it was possible to trace the links but not for this reply.



## Standard English

As seen in the previous sections, even among the positive attitudes towards English language variation, the examples still hint at attitudes that embrace ENL standards, as in the last explicit mention of them and in the longer example where the writer identifies as ESL, something other than a native speaker whose language will deviate from a perceived norm. This attitude toward a standard also arises several times elsewhere in the data, although not as direct comments on another person's writing. For example, in the following exchange, participants explicitly call attention to *correct* English and *errors*, note how variations *creep* in, and aim to *neutralize* the language. (These posts are excerpted from a longer exchange.)

Original Post: At work, I correct English errors in written content for an Indian company which sells its products and services to a global audience. I have been certified as a language neutralization trainer by an organization of repute. I also quote examples from reliable sources, giving credit to the source, when I recommend a change. I follow the rules of Grammar ( Grammar rules constantly evolve don't they!) and syntax when pointing out errors

Response: I do a lot of what you do, informally though. My Jobs involves quality checks of content written for the web. I write blogs about the correct use of English in terms of grammar and syntax.

OP, in response to a question about what a "neutralization trainer" is: When non native speakers of English use the language, the sounds from our regional languages creep into English. So, the same words that you would use as a first language speaker, would sound different when we use it. A neutralization trainer is trained to identify these sounds, isolate them and introduce neutral sounds without the influence of the regional language. It isn't really as complex as I make it sound!

This exchange shows a negative stance toward variation as it describes them as things that *creep* in and that they need to be *isolated*. Jenkins has called attention to the emotive words used to describe negative views of ELF, and the verbs that the participants here connect to English language variation also reference negative emotions (Jenkins "English" 203). (The first example post of this chapter also had word choices that indicated resistance to language change.) The

exchange about language neutralization refers numerous times to standards, grammar rules as codified in reference works. What this exchange shows is an acknowledgement of variations (regional) and of language evolution, yet the posts align with a belief in a correct variety of English.

However, in “correcting” the English, the participant doesn’t note alignment with a native speaker standard, but rather a “neutral,” presumably international, standard of the language. This exchange reflects a belief in a pragmatic standard, a neutral international variety of English whose forms can be codified and then taught. However, research efforts to describe such an international standard have not born fruit. Early ELF research sought to find features that would constitute a codified international English, but over time variability emerged over stable linguistic features that came to characterize ELF: “ELF involves not only the frequent systematic use of certain forms (lexicogrammatical, phonological and so on) that are not found in native English, but also a range of pragmatic on-line processes that determine which particular forms are utilized at any particular point in a given interaction” (Jenkins, Cogo, and Dewey 295). In other words, instead of codifying features that made up an internationally intelligible English, ELF research found that linguistic resources were varied and deployed by speakers in ways that varied individual and by context. As Seidlhofer writes, “ELF users exploit the potential of the language” to create the utterances that best suit their communicative goals with their audience instead of “calling up elements of a foreign language as they were learnt at school and pressing them into service as ‘correctly’ as possible” (Seidlhofer “Common Ground” 242). Overall, ELF finds itself in a space of tension between describing observed regularities while still accounting of the large degree of inherent fluidity of ELF communication (Jenkins, Cogo, and Dewey 296). Similar tensions are evident on these MOOC discussion forums. While participants’

understanding and accommodation to the fluidity of ELF communication is evident in their expressions related to their ideas about national and individual variation, this exchange about neutralizing language emphasizes a standard.

The problem of believing in the existence of a single, unvarying language variety is that such a mythological variety becomes a tool to exclude or demean those who stray from its imagined dictates. Discussing its effects in composition, Horner and Lu describe the problem as one of “ideologies linking reified notions of language and national identity, or in terms of the ‘globalization’ of a monolithic, uniform English as an international language of communication” (Horner and Lu 141). This ideology results in writing instruction that “fails to recognize the actual heterogeneity of language practices within as well as outside the US and UK and denies the heterogeneity of practices within English itself” (Horner and Lu 141). Disavowing the English varieties that writing use, promotes an unrealistic standard for writing in instructional spaces; even when acknowledging the legitimacy of variation, composition spaces can risk belittling them. Even in this post, the participants’ belief in this single standard is not absolute. Even as the participants use their expertise to support that belief, one still acknowledges language change: “grammar rules constantly evolve.”

In a singular exception for the threads in these forums, one participant explained their experiences with negative attitudes towards multilingualism and little to no tolerance, much less embrace, of variation.

As operations manager in a prestigious hotel, where the staff is 50% Americans and 50% Latins is extremely important to have knowledge of both languages - in a nutshell be bilingual, sometimes be an advantage but other times it's a double-edged sword because they used you for their benefits and when you want to use in your good, coldly tell you "I do not understand", then it was worth being bilingual or not? I've had to learn to shut up at the right time to not replicate or complain, sometimes it is better to go unnoticed by your assess, your knowledge's. I have a degree as a translator, is to say that you can translate two languages, which can help by depending on you and your

intelligence and the way that you are involved as a professional in your area. In summary We should use our skills to help in the growth of our Latino community that is growing tremendously day by day in major labor source in the market.

This post brings up a number of issues related to language diversity. Of all the examples so far, this one has the most English language variations from ENL norms: sentence boundaries, spelling, punctuation, verb forms, and other syntactical variations. Despite the variations, the post is still comprehensible and conveys the participant's situation, the problem at hand, the participant's call to action, and their passion for the topic. Even with the marked variation, this poster, like earlier participants, calls on their own language expertise to support the legitimacy of the post. The participant notes that they are bilingual, work in a bilingual environment, and have certification as a translator. The fact that the post did not receive any direct replies is not necessarily an indication of an answer to the question of how much variation can ELF exchanges tolerate before comprehension breaks down, for many posts receive no responses, including those corresponding most with ENL forms.

The post differs from the previous examples in its explicit description of intolerance towards language variation. While posts previously discussed imply that a standard exists (neutralization trainer) and that English speakers of a particular, often native speaker, variety may have a deficit perspective (wry smiles), those posts position those attitudes within an acknowledgment or praise of variation. In this post, the participant describes attitudes in which reaction to variation is used to the detriment of the speakers. There are clues within this exchange, namely the types of employees noted at the beginning and the reference to the type of labor market at the end, that suggests the participant is writing from the United States, where language diversity can be treated as a benefit for some (namely elective bilinguals who choose to acquire another language) and not others (circumstantial bilinguals who must acquire another

language due to life circumstances such as refugees) (Valdés 43). The post describes a situation, likely located in the US, in which linguistic variations are not valued, unlike the prevalent views expressed in these discussion forums from the writing MOOC.

In answer to the research question, “What attitudes do participants demonstrate toward language change and variation in their interactions about writing?” the posts show that participants acknowledge variation through time and across communities as normal, they express positive views of that variation as they focus on the importance of meaning in negotiation. At the same time, some show a belief in a variation-free version of global English; that while variations are normal, they can be removed to a global standard English. These tensions between variation and standard illustrate how beliefs about language are complex. Research into language attitudes has shown that not all of a person’s view on language will point in the same direction. For example, “it is not unusual for some groups to both value their language as a marker of their group identity and, at the same time, hold negative views of it in terms of its utility and social prestige” (Riagáin). Such conflicts are readily seen in research on attitudes of teachers and students towards ELF. Jenkins found that teachers of English in contexts where the language is treated as a foreign language of instruction strongly connected the idea of “good” English with a native speaker norm, yet they also expressed a desire to vary their English use in ways to “project their own local identity in their English” (“English” 204). The mentions of English on the MOOC discussion forums in this study similarly call some attention to an international standard and more strongly endorse the legitimacy of variation. In other words, in these mentions of language, there were negative threads in the overall positive weave of attitudes towards variation.

Overall, the data in this chapter have shown that the ELF users in this space acknowledge variation and work with it in the context of this US-based MOOC on rhetoric and writing. At the same time, one post emphasizes how participants also face other contexts, likely in the US, in which the variation is used against them and the global adeptness is not valued. This difference illustrates how the ELF context exerts an influence not only on the communicative practices but also on the attitudes. The following chapters illustrate communicative practices that facilitate work across language differences: accommodating culturally-laden language and of “getting it done” across lexico-grammatical variations.

## CHAPTER 5

### IDIOMS: USE, STRATEGIES, AND RESPONSES

#### Introduction

Idioms emerged as a salient feature of the communication on the MOOC discussion forums. The ways in which participants employed idioms across the discussion forums illustrate accommodation to a globally diverse audience and sheds light on the second research question of this study: What accommodation and negotiation strategies do globally diverse English language users employ in their interactions in an online writing education environment? In sum, idiom use on the MOOC discussion forums both shows a *feature* of the discourse and also illustrates a variety of *accommodation strategies* in the way that the participants employ this feature. This chapter presents the idioms used across the two forums with some analysis as to their distribution, compares the MOOC idioms to other researched lists of idioms in academic contexts, and finally considers the purposes and variations in idiom use. Then the chapter shows how participants adapt their use of the idioms in this globally and linguistically diverse context through accommodation strategies such as formatting choices and repetition in unidiomatic language. The third section of the chapter presents and analyzes a discussion forum interaction that illustrates idioms use and response. The last section presents how accommodation strategies related to idioms connect to intercultural awareness skills that participants in globally diverse spaces, including US-based OWI.

As noted in chapter 3, idioms are a type of formulaic language in which the meaning of the phrase cannot be clearly deduced from the meanings of its constituent parts (Crystal via Carey 92), but that last characterization about the composibility of idioms is complicated. One view of idioms treated them as frozen metaphors, as creative language that over time and use

became habitual and institutionalized, and as a result the meaning appears arbitrary since even the connection with the original metaphor was lost (Rodriguez-Arrizabalaga). Thus, the connection between “to blow your stack” and being angry in current use is opaque and not decomposable. This diachronic view of idioms emphasizing language change over time says that “it is essentially the extensive use of certain metaphors within one speech community which brings about their conventionalization, institutionalization and codification in the course of time and which, turns the metaphor into an idiom” (Pitzl “We Should” 302).

However, more recent theories connect idioms with underlying metaphors; while the traditional view calls the metaphors underlying idioms ‘dead,’ in this view the metaphors are ‘sleeping’ (Pitzl “We Should” 303). That is to say, “the form-meaning relation underlying many idiomatic expressions is far from arbitrary – it is motivated not only by their primitive meaning but also by conventional images and conceptional metaphors” (Rodriguea-Arrizabaga). For example, “to spill the beans” connects to the underlying concept that treats the mind as a container for ideas and knowledge (Rodriguea-Arrizabaga), “to drop the ball” connects to the underlying metaphor of *mental control is physical control* (Zyzik 415), “to blow your stack” and “to lose your cool” connect to the metaphor that *anger is a heated fluid in a container* (Gibbs *et al.* 142). In sum, research into the decomposability of idioms shows that analysis of underlying metaphors reveals more decomposability than first apparent (Zyzik 414-5). This connection to underlying metaphors is part of what make the determination of composibility or opacity difficult to concretely determine. It can be useful to see the idioms on a continuum, as some have posited, from more transparent, such as “ebb and flow” to more opaque, such as “let the cat out of the bag”; the more opaque idioms are sometimes called “pure” or “core” idioms.



While metaphors underlying idioms may be broadly understood, the institutionalization and conventionalization of the phrase happens within particular communities, and thus idioms still can be problematic in communication spaces with many international and multilingual and ELF users. As Pitzl states, “viewed within a framework of language contact, idioms might thus be considered emblematic instances in which a conventionalized grouping of words represents and evokes a particular (cultural) concept, familiar to those ‘in the know.’” (“World” 299).

While idioms have been called a key indicator of native-like fluency in measurement of L2 acquisition, ELF research has examined them as potential stumbling blocks due to cultural knowledge, even among fluent users of the language (Franceschi 78). In other words, knowing the cultural concept is necessary to understanding the idioms used in interactions, which could be problematic for communication in contexts where participants come from varied cultural backgrounds, even more so if those participants are not aware of their idiom usage and/or the presence of their intercultural participants. If one participant uses idioms that the audience does not understand, communication can break down. For example, if in discussing a problem, one person says that the group needs to “grab the bull by the horns,” those unfamiliar with this idiom could fail to grasp the call to address the problem directly unless the speaker provides other contextual information or rephrasing to clarify the point. Such usage has implications for composition spaces with globally diverse students. For example, when a writing instructor once praised an international student by saying that her paper had “hit the ball out of the park,” the student asked what she had done wrong: she was unfamiliar with the US baseball reference and the instructor was unaware, or at least inattentive, to his use of sports metaphors and their effects on students unfamiliar with the cultural reference.

This chapter will show the idioms used on the MOOC discussion forums. Then the discussion will turn to how participants attend to these idioms, what accommodation strategies they use (and do not use), and what these strategies mean for use of idioms and other culturally specific language in English language communication in globally diverse spaces. This analysis will show that when using idioms, culturally aware participants use two main accommodation strategies: (1) calling explicit attention to the idiom through formatting or naming, and (2) rephrasing before or after the idiom.

### **Idioms in ELF and on the MOOC Discussion Forums**

Presentation of the idioms from the discussion board data will begin by showing how those idioms compare to currently available research on idioms in English academic communication, then move to describe what idioms are used in fixed and variable forms to talk about the content of writing, and finally conclude by examining what idioms participants use to talk about writing processes.

The presence and use of idioms on these MOOC discussion forums appear to go against research on idioms used in English generally. In one of the seminal in-depth examinations of idioms, Moon found that formulaic sequences, including idioms, are more common in speech than in writing. While Moon found that pure idioms are rarely used, they are more likely to appear in written discourse. A decade later, in their examination based on an extensive corpus of American and British English, Biber *et al.*, also found that “for the most part, idioms are not common” (1025), and, in fact, they noted that idioms were more present in fiction than in other areas, including conversation, leading to the conclusion that “idioms are used more commonly to represent stereotyped dialogue in fiction than in actual conversation” (1025). Yet idioms did appear throughout the MOOC discussion forum threads in the data for this study (see Appendix

B). One reason for the difference might be attributed to the context and register; Biber *et al.*'s study included formal, edited texts in the forms of published fiction, news, and academic prose in addition to conversation, whereas the digital discourse on the MOOC discussion forums would not fit into those areas since such digital discourse has blended aspects of both written and oral speech.

Indeed, some research on idioms has concluded that idiom use is closely connected to context and mode (Liu 674-5). While Biber *et al.* found their use to be uncommon, they could point to some subtle distinctions: while still rare, idioms using verbs were more common than other types, some idioms were predominately used in academic prose (*take into account, bear in mind*), and idioms also occurred in news stories to lighten serious topics (1026). Overall, studies of idioms generally “agree that physical, social, and interactional context influence the kinds of idiomatic expressions used” (Steen 81). In sum, while research into idiom use in English discourse generally finds them uncommon, their emergence as a feature of the discourse in the discussion forums for this study relies not necessarily on how commonly idioms appear, but rather how the online, cooperative, and international context affects the use of the idioms.

In the context of an online learning environment, examining the idioms in light of academic uses of the figure of speech illustrates what idioms are used and to what purpose. As noted in the methodological steps for this study, after the determination of idioms as a feature of interest, one step in confirming the feature was to look for idioms that had been deemed important for academic English. In their examination of idiom use in academic English, Simpson and Mendis compiled a list of idioms that occur four or more times in the MICASE corpus of spoken academic English. From that list, they highlighted idioms they considered particularly useful to be taught in academic English courses. Simpson and Mendis then added several idioms

that did not appear as frequently in the corpus but that they still deemed important for language learners focusing on academic language. Of the forty-two idioms on their list, only ten appear in the MOOC discussion forum data for this study, as listed below. Of those ten, only three of those idioms appear in more than one discussion forum post. Of the subset that Simpson and Mendis highlight as particularly useful for academic English, only five appear in the discussion forums. Below are excerpts of MOOC participants' posts in which they use idioms that appear on the Simpson and Mendis list; an asterisk marks the idioms that Simpson and Mendis considered especially important for academic contexts (see Appendix C for a comparison to their entire list).

you work hand in hand with people that have enormous amount of field experience.\*

Having tennis lesson and playing with other players have to go hand in hand.\*

when to step back and look at the bigger picture.\*

your comment opened my eyes to the larger picture \*

7 years down the line we have proof

They did however draw the line at coming to work wearing rival companies logos\*

I'd like to just jump in to give an enthusiastic "two thumbs up" to your initial post

Since that time I promised to myself that I will fight for love, because "you don't fall in love with a gender, you fall in love with a person"

you seem to have a good handle on how to get your work published.\*

I'm familiar with Ricoeur, and Ehrman rings a bell

I could go off on a real tangent here\*

I get off on tangents often enough in discussions here\*

extremely important to have knowledge of both languages in a nutshell be bilingual,\*

The fact that there is so little correspondence between the academic idiom list and the data for this study could be due to several factors. With just under sixty thousand words as compared to

the almost two million in the MICASE, there were fewer opportunities to use idioms. Another possibility for the mismatch would be that the participants were adjusting their speech to the internationally diverse audience in the MOOC, which was not a function in the context of the MICASE data. However, belying that idea is the fact that idioms in the MOOC were not as rare as the above list suggests; other idioms appeared throughout the two forums. For example, the following comes from posts in which participants talk about the content for their writing or present ways in which they have personal, credible authority in their response to the video on *ethos*.

Are you willing to walk that extra mile?

walk that extra mile to achieve your goal

I really appreciate your passion and willingness to go the "extra mile".

A walk on the wild side every now and then

my walk on the wild side last year

cycles of ebb and flow in terms of participation.

Sometimes the dialog goes off track, etc

we are going to turn this bus around

The cat is out of the proverbial bag.

every cloud has a silver-lining.

My first grade teacher hit the nail right on the head.

"Washing dirty linen in public" does not help anyone.

Participants use the above idioms to serve a number of pragmatic functions, which have been described by several researchers investigating idiom use in academic discourse (Franceschi, Simpson and Mendis). One of the key pragmatic uses of idioms in academic context, according

to Simpson and Mendis, is in description when explaining content (428-9), and the idioms above clearly serve this function as the participants tell of experiences that support their own *ethos* and as they give examples to support their choice of paper topic. The two idioms that are repeated across the posts illustrate two additional pragmatic functions: emphasis and collaboration (Simpson and Mendis 430-1). The three examples of *going the extra mile* come from distinct posts and replies; none are directly connected to the other. The first two come from separate posts describing the difficulty and efforts needed (1) to learn another language and (2) to communicate across language differences. In each of those posts, the idea of expending effort is well-established before the idiom is used; thus, the idioms serve the function of emphasizing a point rather than explaining the idea in and of themselves. Arguably, the third mention serves a similar function; while the reply post itself is rather short, it replies to a post about the efforts involved in teaching, and thus emphasizes the original poster's point. The other repeated idiom, *walk on the wild side*, comes from an original post and one of its replies, thus illustrating the function of collaboration: "when taking up another's use of an idiom in a discussion and repeating it, perhaps with variation, both to collaborate in the discussion as well as create solidarity" (Simpson and Mendis 431). All of these uses of idioms also conform to Franceschi's description of functions of idioms in academic ELF discourse: getting attention as idioms are used to make a vivid description, and clarity as the idioms are used to support a point through repetition (87-89).

While participants used the idioms discussed above to explain and respond to ideas about content in writing, a particularly important use of idioms in the discussion occurred when the participants posted about their composing practices and writing processes, as described below. These uses fit Simpson and Mendis's list of pragmatic functions of academic discourse less well:

to some degree they are used for description, but they are not explaining content; some seem to show collaboration, but not through repeating the idiom that another had used. However, many of the idioms below can fit Franceschi's category of problem-solving, as participants use them to illustrate the processes of writing, of encountering trouble or overcoming it as they develop and comment on each others' writing topics.

the "ebb and flow" of ideas

I have my job cut out for me

you stuck your neck out on this one

Back to square one under a new thread.

I've gone down a bit of a rabbit's hole on the research.

doing so gives you a kind of "leg up" on the research

These idioms in these contexts may be worth particular attention when teaching US-based composition courses to globally diverse students for use in their discussions with peers regarding their writing processes.

While idioms are often characterized as being fixed in their expression, research has found that variations of idioms are not uncommon (Simpson and Mendis 435-6). The same can be said of idioms in the discussion forums, for the posts exhibit several variations, most frequently when discussing topics for papers (see table 4). Research into English idioms use has illustrated that idiom use shows considerable variation especially in terms of verbs, participles, and truncation: "Fixedness is a key property of [fixed expressions and idioms], yet around 40% of database [fixed expressions and idioms] have lexical variations or strongly institutionalized transformations, and around 14% have two or more variations on their canonical forms" (Moon 120 via Liu 675). On the other hand, variations can be perceived as errors, mistakes in form that

Table 4: Idiom Variations

Variation from discussion forums	Fixed, institutionalized form of idiom (Ayto)
With my <u>out of the boxness</u> (awful cliché) I tend to..	Think outside the box
I am 'Ms- <u>keep-it-as-close-to-the-chest-as-possible</u> ')...	Keep something close to one's chest
A translator is someone who is eager to <u>put on the shoes of another person</u>	To be in another person's shoes
Fortunately, <u>this is a drum that has many beaters</u>	To beat the drum for something

indicate lack of fluency in English, and the latter three examples on the variation list illustrate this danger, as their posts reveal several variations from ENL norms<sup>7</sup>. One might read their variations of idioms as creative uses or as “idioms ‘gone wrong’...the re-metaphorization of idioms,” as Pitzl describes in her work on idiom variation in ELF discourse (“We should” 317). As Pitzl further notes, these uses of idioms serve important functions in the discourse, as noted above, and “To deprive speakers of this creative linguistic potential by devaluating these expressions simply as errors best avoided would seem to be counter-productive—it would seem (metaphorically speaking) to be ‘pouring the child out with the bathwater’” (“We should” 317). Franceschi’s research focused on NNEs use of idioms in ELF spaces also showed the variation as strategic rather than as error, noting that while ELF users are familiar to some degree with

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<sup>7</sup> For example, the variation in articles, preposition, and word form in a longer excerpt from one of those posts show deviations from native speaker norms: “I felt in love with translation (English-Spanish) a long time ago. It is a way to be updated in many issues and in those two languages mainly.... I have had the privilege to translate more than a dozen of books, lots of articles and studies ... A translator is someone who is eager to put on the shoes of another person and is engaged in pouring his/her ideas, feelings and beliefs in another language.”



fixed idiomatic phrases, they also “appear to adopt ‘idiomatizing’ as an accommodation strategy, that is, the creation of extemporary idiomatic expressions to serve a specific communicative purpose in the context of the ongoing interactions” (85) and in the study’s data, more than a third of the instances showed this variation. As noted in earlier ELF research (Pitzl “We should,” Pomodrou “Kettles”), the variations did not appear to cause misunderstanding (86).

The above lists from the data attempt to show, in an organized way, what idioms are used on the discussion boards, how those idioms compare to currently available research on idioms in English academic communication, what idioms are used in fixed and variable forms to talk about the content of writing, and what idioms are used to talk about writing processes. However, examining the use of idioms in academic English speech particularly, Simpson and Mendis find that use of idioms seemed to be more connected with particular speakers and thus was a feature of an individual’s idiolect over any linguistic feature of the discourse (437).

The distribution of idioms in the subgenres of academic speech seems not to be predictable on the basis of categories or either level of interactiveness or academic division. Rather, we should conclude that the use of idioms seems to be a feature more of individual speakers’ idiolects than of any linguistic or content-related categories. Some speakers in our corpus used idioms quite frequently whereas others rarely did, regardless of their social-interactional roles. (437, emphasis added)

That is to say that using idioms appears to be an individual’s choice rather than a feature of a field (literature, psychology, biology, etc.) or type of interaction (class lecture, student presentation, group discussion, etc.).

The MOOC discussion forum data shows some congruence with Simpson and Mendis’s findings in this regard. For example, as they found idiom use did not correlate with academic

division, there was little, if any, discernable difference in idiom use between the two different discussions examined for this study: unlike mentions of languages noted in chapter 4, which appeared more frequently in one forum over the other, idioms were used across both the *ethos* discussion thread and in the *Activity 6.1* forum. What can be seen is that the idioms are employed differently in the posts. Some posts contain several idioms while many have none, some idioms feature formatting choices that imply attention to use of these forms in a global forum while others are unsupported, and some participants use idioms frequently in their discussions throughout a post and its comments. These differences, discussed in the next section, suggest that use of idioms is an idiolectic choice rather than determined by register.

### **Accommodation Strategies: Variation in Use**

While idioms can be problematic as they can rely on a particular culture or English variation for meaning, that doesn't mean that idioms are always a problem in multilingual, multicultural interactions. ELF users can deploy idioms in ways that preempts misunderstandings. As Franceschi notes, idiomatic language can be used in ways as to fulfill the cooperative principle of conversation, by which participants accommodate their language in a given situation to communicate successfully (Franceschi 70). Savvy ELF communicators don't completely avoid idioms; rather they deploy them strategically and with language accommodation strategies that appeal to a varied group of interlocutors.

Strategies to use idioms in ELF inclusive ways include highlighting idiom use through introductions, clarifying them with rephrasings, and sometimes avoiding them altogether. These accommodation strategies are not unique to idioms but rather are well-established and well-researched features of ELF communication. ELF communication generally involves a great deal of cooperation to achieve the goals of any exchange. The cooperation and goals usually take

precedence over adherence to particular language varieties, and thus adept ELF communicators adjust their speech to their interlocutors. The ways in which interlocutors adjust—or do not adjust—has been described by Giles and Copeland in social psychology and widely adopted in ELF (Baker *Culture* 20, Cogo “Accommodating” 255, Zhu 69). Their framework, Communication Accommodation Theory, describes how interlocutors adjust their speech at levels such as pronunciation, phrasing, discourse, and gesture to be more similar to each other (convergence) or to emphasize difference (divergence) (Giles and Oatley 295). CAT explains these adjustments as ubiquitous, immediate, and often unconscious ways of negotiating social interaction in spoken interactions – and, as research has begun to show, in online interactions as well (Dragojevic, Gasiorek, and Giles 36). Whether unconscious or not, the underlying motivations for adapting elements of communication involve social identity maintenance, cognitive efforts toward enhancing comprehensibility, or combinations of both (Dragojevic, Gasiorek, and Giles 42-3). In this way, “The model of accommodation captures the social and psychological motivation for Negotiation in interactions. Driven by their goals of communication, participants negotiate, often subconsciously, the degree and the direction of convergence (or divergence) from their listeners as part and parcel of interaction” (Zhu 70). When the goal includes ensuring mutual understanding within a diverse group of participants, “accommodation is essential as participants likely have fewer shared resources” (Baker, *Culture*, 41), such as shared cultural references, content knowledge, and language variety.

In the discussion board forums for this study, variations in the format and phrasing when idioms were used implied some degree of awareness and/or skill in communicating with multilingual, global interlocutors. In other words, some participants called attention to their idioms through formatting or explication and these moves can be seen as accommodations to a

global audience. ELF researchers have noted that in speaking, typical accommodation strategies employed when an idiom is used include (1) an immediate gloss or rephrase after the idiom before the discourse continues, or (2) retroactive rephrasing after misunderstanding is indicated (Cogo, "Accommodating, 259; Franceschi 91). On the discussion forum, retroactive rephrasing was not apparent, but two proactive strategies did appear: calling attention to the idiom through formatting, and restatements of the idiom in less figurative language. At the same time, multiple instances of no accommodation occurred. These three treatments of idioms are discussed below.

**Formatting** Several participants call attention to idioms in their post through formatting, namely highlighting the phrase with quotation marks, as with the first three examples below, or through explicit indications, indicated in the last two examples with the terms *cliche* and *proverbial*.

In addition to what you've noted, I'd add that you all need *not* continue with the same subject as the PSA. Certainly, doing so gives you a kind of "leg up" on the research that you might want or need to do--but it's not required to stay with the same topic.

Opinions previously expressed by others (whether sufficiently or persuasively argued or not) may be contested, revised, dismissed, built upon, etc. The conversation metaphor is, of course, just that--a metaphor. At the same time, it demonstrates the "ebb and flow" of ideas that circulate around a subject.

people should be encouraged to discuss their issues/concerns with the company such that it helps to improve the company. "Washing dirty linen in public" does not help anyone.

I'd like to just jump in to give an enthusiastic "two thumbs up" to your initial post

Sounds like you have taken the first step in being BRAVE and that is telling everyone about how you're going to be brave. The cat is out of the proverbial bag..ha.

With my out of the boxness (awful cliche) I tend to go for that which as well as feeling vertiginous personally also has the potential for pushing other folk's comfort buttons, so expect that from me in my essay:)

The quotation marks and the explicit references signal that these phrases are somehow out of the ordinary. If a reader pauses to try and figure out how doing laundry connects to general business

communication policies (as in the third example), they may not waste too much time on the literal meanings in light of the quotation marks. By highlighting the idioms, participants show awareness of their use of language forms that may not be culturally accessible for a globally diverse audience. These attention-getting accommodations accord with research in ELF idiom use: in an examination of idiom variation, Pitzl highlights how explicit flagging indicates conscious use and that by using idioms in this way, the speakers are showing themselves to be multicompetent ELF users who are aware of the cultural territory of the ELF interaction and deploy their own cultural resources skillfully as a part of it (Pitzl “World” 306).

**Additional information** Another way of accommodating to globally diverse English interlocutors when using idioms is through self rephrasing. Cogo has found repetitions of idioms in less idiomatic terms to be an example of strategic use of that accommodation. In the example below, the participant used an idiom to highlight the point being made. In this way, contextual cues or repetition of the point makes comprehension of the idiom unnecessary to understanding the content. In other words, not knowing the idiom would not impede communication.

It is more often than not that extra effort you put into it: how devoted are you to your training and learning? How independent are you? How autonomous are you? Do you really enjoy it to the extent that you are willing to sacrifice all else to devote yourself to your activity? Are you willing to walk that extra mile?

Put simply, if I am able to write this paragraph in a language other than my own and you are able to read it and understand it, it stands to reason that we have put endless effort into it. Let me explain: If you want to learn a new language or any take up any other activity, say sports or writing, what you have to do is to devote yourself fully to the task you are undertaking. Doing things piecemeal or haphazardly will not take you anywhere. You have to devote time and effort and walk that extra mile to achieve your goals. Most successful people in different fields of endeavour have only gotten there after much dedication and sacrifice.

Even though the two examples above use the same idiom, they come from two different threads. In each of them, the post contains multiple references to effort, sacrifice, devotion, and

dedication which support the meaning of *walk that extra mile* not literally mean the physical activity across distance. Using an idiom in this way may not be intended as an accommodation strategy, but rather the accommodation emerges as a by-product of using an idiom for emphasis of an already established point, one of the purposes of using idioms mentioned earlier. That being said, it is equally possible that the participants only chose to include the idiom once the meaning had been established.

Mauranen and Franceschi have found rephrasing to be an important part of academic ELF speech, and the examples above show the same phenomenon in digital written discourse. Mauranen shows that self repetition is used to anticipate and proactively avoid miscommunication or non-understanding. Franceschi's examples of NNEs in academic exchanges supports that finding, adding that "the marked language choice inherent in the idiomatic rephrasing reinforces and places emphasis on the intended concept, raising the listener's attention and increasing the chance of successful communication" (91). The examples from the MOOC discussion forums shows how participants, whether consciously or not, employ proactive self repetition in conjunction with idioms in ways that accommodate a situation in which not all participants may have the same cultural and linguistic resources to understand the idiom alone.

**No Accommodation** When participants use idioms on the discussion forums, often no accommodation appears. In these instances, participants may be unaware of their idiom use, or believe that the cultural knowledge to understand the idioms is shared among all participants, or be using idioms to emphasize their social identity with a specific group to which such cultural references are shared. While the discussion forum data does not shed light on the participants'

decisions to make no adjustments, it does show instances in which discussion forum participants use idioms without restatements or formats highlighting the phrases.

"Barbie has a bubbly personality." My first grade teacher hit the nail right on the head. In my neighborhood growing up, I was the girl you sent down to the store to pick up milk or help a widow cut her coupons.

don't honestly know that I believe we are going to turn this bus around before it's too late- but I think if we are going to manage to survive as a species (which incidentally I don't know is best for the planet), albeit in considerably smaller numbers, we're going to need everyone we can get

I think I have my job cut out for me in regard to establishing myself as a rhetorical proponent of reading stories such as myths, fables, and other children's stories as a means of value development over one's lifetime.

I'm glad you stuck your neck out on this one. I hope that you feel rewarded during every moment that you work on it! I hope you have faith that your learning will be a great journey!

I've gone down a bit of a rabbit's hole on the research.

I think this topic is too specific a problem to outline, and rather insurmountable unless I ended the article with a call to overthrow the rich in a violent uprising that would make the French Revolution seem like a strike at a daycare center. Back to square one under a new thread.

In the examples above, the participant does not call attention to the idioms nor add clear restatements in unidiomatic speech. In some cases, there are clues to the meanings, such as the idea of "a new thread" after "back to square one." In others, the idiom is largely left to convey the message on its own; for example, the "stuck your neck out" is followed by sentences about reward without alluding further to the risk-taking that the idiom describes. Using idioms in this way among global participants carries an increased chance of miscommunication or non-understanding; it demonstrates a lack of awareness of effective communication accommodation for the context (or even awareness of that context) at best, or at worse a stance that demands acquiescence to a certain cultural, likely native-English speaking, variety of the language.

Using idioms with or without accommodation has been observed in ELF research regarding the behavior of native English speakers. In Carey's study of academic ELF interactions, he examined how participants addressed "the issue of culture-specific, [ENL] idiomatic language" (91). In the transcripts of eight hours of talk from the EFLA corpus, Carey was struck by the frequent use of core idioms by native speakers. He observed multiple instances where the native speaker used—sometimes repeatedly—idioms without any clarification or indication that the speaker was aware that these expressions could cause misunderstanding. As with the examples from the MOOC discussion forum, Carey's data showed that when using idioms, native speakers showed varying levels of awareness of the idioms. At one end, the data showed a lack of accommodation, as above. In other instances, the speaker demonstrated awareness by rephrasing, either with proactive rephrasing by offering a gloss immediately after the idiom (e.g., "I'm kind of a movie buff myself I like movies") or with retroactive rephrasing when the interlocutor indicated misunderstanding (Carey "Hard to Ignore" 93-4). Carey concludes that these latter examples "could serve as examples of optimal accommodation by [ENL speakers] in ELF speech events" and notes that such accommodation could be guidelines for native speakers who are less aware of how idiomatic speech can cause misunderstanding in ELF communicative situations (94).

### **Response to Idioms**

In terms of responses to these features, a couple of themes along with difficulties in obtaining results appear. If the variation or idiom caused communication interruption, that misunderstanding is not present in the discussion board. It may be that if the feature caused difficulty, the response was to not respond. In face to face communication, that lack of response due to non-understanding is more apparent than in an online forum with a massive number of



participants. In a face-to-face discussion, the immediate response, even lack of response, can indicate where communication breakdowns occur. However, in asynchronous online discussion threads, particularly ones with many participants and where participation is optional, many conversations happen at the same time, and participants do not track all of them, deciding to respond or not based on many factors beyond non-understanding (interest, time, level of engagement, etc.). Other posts may come in after many participants have stopped reading the board. Based on the discussion forum posts alone, it cannot be ascertained whether participants do not respond because they are not interested, because the language is causing communicative difficulties, or because of other reasons.

On the other hand, there are numerous cases in which the discourse seems to proceed along without interruption. The exchange below between four participants shows not only how the idioms used do not appear to be causing any confusion but also how use of idioms is often a feature of a person's idiolect, even in academic discourse, and those who use idioms use them often (Simpson and Mendis 437). In this exchange from the discussion thread discussion potential topics for the final MOOC project, participant B uses numerous idioms, much more than the other interlocutors, and thus idiom use appears to be part of that person's idiolect.

A: I think this topic is too specific a problem to outline, and rather insurmountable unless I ended the article with a call to overthrow the rich in a violent uprising that would make the French Revolution seem like a strike at a daycare center.  
Back to square one under a new thread.

B: Hahaha! I was just thinking that you could be sourcing the same research materials that I am. I took the economic crisis as my 'proof' rather than the environment which for some reason doesn't seem to strike the chord it once did- it did once, right? Ultimately the solution/approach I'm advocating would address responsible stewardship/health/equality/etc but I'm going for what I hope packs the most punch. Time will tell though- it's a complex issue  
 Where's your new thread by the way? It's getting more and more difficult to track anyone down as the forums fill up...

C: I don't think it is insurmountable. I think though you should work on your interested in statement... I think you should be more specific about your audience, and your own background. This should help focus a lot on the facts and the solutions to propose. Instead of tackling the whole issue, tackle a part specific to a particular audience.

A: [participant B], I'm still mulling over the prospect of changing my focus. [...]  
 Personally, I believe the climate challenge presents a much greater threat to the continuation of our civilization than the machinations of Wall Street and why the public has lost interest can likely be credited to the disinformation lobby by the Oil and Gas industry. Then again, it's all interconnected - just like life on Gaia!  
 [Participant C], I may very well reconsider my decision to change topics. The trouble is, as I identified in my comment above, is that But how do you research a probability, not a certainty [...]  
 I will have to give this some more thought. Thanks to you both for your comments.

B: Oh I absolutely agree that the environmental damage is a much bigger concern than Wall Street. I'm not proposing we 'fix' the current economic model either, which I think could only ever be a temporary fix- until the next crisis, or series of crises- it is after all a house of cards. [...] I think that the challenge will be to stand out from the crowd- my own opinion is that while some people may still be talking about the environment, very few are actually doing anything about it... And not get overwhelmed by the magnitude of the problem/proposal, a line I'm having difficulty walking myself right now...

D: What you wrote, [participant A], "But how do you research a probability, not a certainty", made me think back about my own experience, more than 20 years ago, when I joined a discussion group (set up in the context of a political party: discussing new approaches to policies) about environmental issues.  
 We called that project "Come se" (As if) and it drew from a quite innovating assumption: [...] It was a fantastic work, with a lot of research involved, which of course did not have any effect whatsoever.

As noted above, B uses many idioms, which means that they appear to be a part of B's idiolect, and B does not employ any accommodating strategies to avoid potential communication difficulties. The original poster, participant A, uses metaphorical language, including idioms, in the first turn, imaginably to lighten the seriousness of turning to a new topic for writing. The other two participants in the exchange, C and D, take part after multiple idiom use but do not use any themselves. On the one hand, this suggests that the idioms did not cause communicative trouble, but on the other hand, C and D both respond to participant A and do not extend the

discussion along the lines that B brought up, which could indicate non-understanding of B's points, that the idiom use did interfere with communication. Also worth noting is that in A's second turn, A responds directly to B and C separately, directly, and with some shift in tone reflecting that of A's interlocutors: with a light finish with cultural references to B, and with more straightforward language to C. In this way, A accommodates their response style to the other participants. The lack of any response to D's contribution raises more questions than answers; perhaps the lack of response was due to the timing of D's contribution (visually last, so it may have been posted quite a bit later after the previous interaction; however, this cannot be determined because the time stamps are unreliable in the data) or the fact that D discusses a personal experience rather than directly advises or asks about the progression of A's topic, so A doesn't respond. However, on the whole, the exchange emphasizes how idioms appear to be an idiolectic feature and how participants can adapt responses to accommodate to interlocutors. The accommodation used by A arguably shows deft adaptation to the globally diverse context.

The exchange above has highlighted not only accommodation but also, in the case of participant B, a lack of it. As noted earlier, when participating in a global forum, an individual's choice to use idioms and other English expressions typical to a regional community without any accommodation causes problems in globally diverse situations. In ELF, Seidlhofer coined the phrase "unilateral idiomaticity" to capture this dicey communicative situation: unilateral idiomaticity describes communicative situations "where particularly idiomatic speech by one participant can be problematic when the expressions used are not known to the interlocutor(s)" ("Research" 220). Others had described this situation decades before Seidlhofer named it (Podromou "Kettles" 34), but her labeling of the concept brought issues of unilateral idiomaticity into sharp salience for ELF researchers. In the exchange, participant B demonstrates unilateral

idiomaticity by not adapting their use of idioms for the context. In other words, B uses idioms frequently and leaves the culturally-based language unsupported without clarification for anyone not familiar with those phrases. As the *Activity 6.1* forum happens later in the MOOC sequence, participant B would be well aware of the globally diverse character of the group of participants in the MOOC, yet the individual's posts persist with frequent idiom use without accommodation; in essence, assuming that others understand the idiomatic phrases rooted in a particular, likely native speaker, linguaculture. Participant B may not be aware of this issue, or they may assume the others know the idioms. However, if other participants do not follow the idioms that B uses, they can choose to interrupt the interaction and ask for clarification or to take time to seek other clarification (e.g., in a dictionary or other reference work), or simply not interact with B. If enough participants act like B, then the norms of communication in this space excludes those who may be quite functionally fluent in English but not fluent in a particular type of English.

This practice of language use that establishes a space for those who use language in the same way cannot link strongly to another concept particularly salient to ELF: territorial imperative. Pitzl summarizes this concept thus “the need to establish and protect one's own space either as an individual or as a member of a social group or speech community. And one way of acting on this territorial imperative is the use of idioms” (*Creativity*). What Pitzl points out here is that using idioms in interactions serves to establish a territorial imperative in that the idiom use indicates membership in a particular community connected to the culturally-loaded constructions of these phrases. In this way, a participant can use idioms with cultural connections to a home culture or group that not everyone in a globally diverse group such as the rhetoric and writing MOOC in this study share. Carey's work on native English speakers in ELF communication notes in terms of their idiom use that “[w]hile this territorial function is relevant

for [ENL speakers], it is inapplicable to an ELF context and may create problems for mutual understanding” (Carey “Hard to Ignore” 92). Thus, the use of idioms in the writing MOOC can create a site of miscommunication, non-understanding, and exclusion.

While idioms can be problematic as they can reflect unilateral idiomaticity and a territorial imperative of a monolingual or monocultural situation, that does not mean that idioms are always an issue in multilingual, multicultural interactions. ELF users can deploy idioms in ways that invokes the territoriality imperative in terms of membership in an international group, that is, by using idioms with strategies to ease understanding across culturally diverse audiences. As Franceschi states, “...idiomatic language is employed to fulfill on the one hand the territorial imperative—that is, it functions as a membership marker, reinforcing the speaker’s social identity both as an individual and as part of a group—and the cooperative principle on the other, which involves accommodating language use in order to communicate successfully in a given interaction” (Franceschi 70). When participants on the MOOC discussion forums use idioms in such a way as to indicate awareness of the culturally-bound nature of that language and accommodate their use of idioms so as to make them less communicatively problematic among globally-diverse interlocutors, the accommodations can be the imperative for a space with such diverse participants. In this way, the discourse norms around idioms can be used to establish a culturally and linguistically diverse—a global—territory. Use of accommodation strategies “suggest affiliation and membership in the same community of ELF users” (Cogo “Accommodating” 25). Savvy ELF communicators don’t completely avoid idioms; rather they deploy them strategically, to identify themselves as individuals from a particular background with particular skills and awarenesses and to identify themselves as part of an international, multilingual, multicultural group. The pragmatic strategies that ELF users employ allow them to

negotiate the local and the global in their use of language; as Canagarajah states “these strategies enable speakers to maintain their own varieties and still communicate without hindrance. This finding goes against the dominant linguistic assumption that it is homogeneity that facilitates communication” (204).

This choice to not eschew but rather accommodate use of culturally-based language forms in a global writing context allows English language users to appeal to a wide audience while enacting local identities. Language users face a dilemma when working with globally diverse interlocutors: “retaining our indigenous cultures and language(s) while reaping the benefits of large-scale integration via a language of wider communication is the challenge many of us will no doubt have to come to terms with in the years to come” (Modiano 225). That challenge involves “communities and individuals [exerting] their agency to negotiate with English and preserve their interests” as they grapple not only with retaining cultures and languages but also with the colonial legacy of English across the world (Canagarajah 202). On the MOOC discussion boards, the varied use of idioms illustrated the actions that users take to negotiate with their global interlocutors while preserving their interests in terms of means of expressions through idioms. A language cannot be neutral (even the language neutralizer from chapter 4 acknowledges the impossibility of that task) and will always have some local flavor to it. By using the accommodative moves noted in this chapter, the MOOC participants use the local flavor of their English variety while also appealing to a global audience.

This point regarding awareness of language and cultural forums in globally diverse communication in English is useful when not only examining online writing instruction spaces such as the MOOC for this study, but it has potential utility when working to transform practices so that US university writing courses that are equitable and effective for global audiences,

including helping domestic US students develop important cross-cultural skills. In one of the only works that explicitly connects EFL and intercultural communication, Will Baker developed the idea of Intercultural Communicative Awareness to connect the two fields since “given the global spread of English, intercultural communication is more likely to occur through English being used as a lingua franca than in any other language used as a lingua franca or otherwise” (Baker *Intercultural* 33). Since ELF involves diverse interlocutors, understanding how communicative practices and language can vary in different groups, national or otherwise, and how to work within and around those norms connects to intercultural communication principles. In recognition of these points, Baker proposes Intercultural Communicative Awareness as

Intercultural awareness is a conscious understanding of the role culturally based forms, practices and frames of references can have in intercultural communication, and an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context specific manner in communication. (Baker *Intercultural* 163)

This definition includes post-modern concepts about identity and groups in terms of how Baker has emphasized flexibility and context. Adapting application of intercultural understanding recognizes that people hold a variety of roles and identities in different groups, with attending communicative practices. In any interaction, participants can bring different allegiances to the fore, adapting communication to the context.

Baker’s approach avoids some of the essentialist positions in some cross-cultural or intercultural communication research and training which strongly tied culture to nation in a comparative, predictive, and problem-oriented stance. In this kind of approach, for example, people from Thailand have certain patterns of communicating and people from Ireland have others. Thus, the two patterns can be compared and contrasted. A person from Ireland can adapt

their patterns (or at least better understand them) for communication with people from Thailand. This characterization is simplified here to a large degree in order to draw a distinction, yet this essentialist view has driven intercultural training for decades (Baker *Intercultural* 165), and, indeed, a similar simplification persists in cross-cultural rhetoric work in the continued popularity of Kaplan's 1966 representation of written organizational patterns from different parts of the world: people from X part of the world write (and think) in Y way. In these views on the connections between communication between people from different international backgrounds, nation, language, and culture are strongly tied, rather static, determined *a priori* in communication, and assumed to cause misunderstandings (Baker *Intercultural* ).

In contrast, Baker's model of Intercultural Awareness (ICA) builds on postmodern takes on intercultural communication which recognize how individuals bring different resources—linguistic, cultural, etc.—to the fore to adapt communication in ways to avoid misunderstanding. Such approaches views of intercultural communication consider how people adapt communication to be understood across cultures (Kauer "Intercultural" 135). As Zhu summarizes, "the best way forward [in intercultural communication studies] is to envisage IC studies as primarily concerned with how individuals, in order to achieve their communication goals, negotiate cultural or linguistic differences ... on how individuals make use of their different linguistic and cultural resources to negotiate understanding" (66). This focus on mobilizing linguistic resources to avoid misunderstanding clearly fit with the goals of ELF research.

Referring back to the data from this study, the participants who accommodated to the global context, for example by formatting idioms, showed Intercultural Awareness for this context; in contexts where they shared the cultural and linguistic norms on which those idioms



are based, the participants may choose to not highlight the idioms in this way. The data from this study do not illustrate explicit references and reflections on the ways in which awareness of cultural backgrounds and assumptions affected their choices, yet their actions on the MOOC discussion forums show practices related to awareness in that participants adapted their use of language that relies heavily on a shared cultural understanding rather than the combination of the literal meanings of the words themselves. Further research could examine participants' explicit understandings about culture and how those ideas influenced their choices to accommodate their idiom use or not.

In sum, the issue is not a simple recognition that idioms are culturally tied and should be avoided in intercultural, ELF communication. That interpretation is too simplistic and prescriptive. Rather, participants can draw upon accommodation practices in intercultural communication to develop their Intercultural Awareness, including the ability to adapt a range of practices to flexibly apply in ELF contexts. The flexibility to choose to use (or not) or adapt (or not) use of culturally bound language such as idioms

This study asks “What accommodation and negotiation strategies do globally diverse English language users employ in their interactions in an online writing education environment?” An examination of the participants' use of idioms shows that participants accommodate through strategies such as formatting and rephrasing. While some participants show these accommodation practices, others use idioms without any accommodation; these practices show a range of intercultural communication awareness among the participants. This study has shown that idioms are not an infrequent feature of the language on these MOOC discussion forums, and while participants use idioms in the types of discussions germane to writing classes, both to discussion of rhetorical concepts as on the *ethos* thread and to discussions about potential writing

project topics as on the *Activity 6.1* forum, the idioms used do not match lists of idioms that other researchers have compiled and suggested for English language teaching. The implication here is that more teaching of idioms as part of academic EFL courses to move global English speakers' fluency to match the native speaking norms of a particular community would not match the communicative needs of global discussion forums. Rather, all participants should raise their Intercultural Awareness in order to be able to "Build intentional cross-cultural connections and relationships with others so to pose and solve problems collaboratively and...[d]esign and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes" (NCTE).

## CHAPTER 6

## LEXICO-GRAMMATICAL VARIATIONS, RESPONSES, AND STRATEGIES

**Introduction**

Thus far, the results illustrated in the previous two chapters have moved from attitudes toward language to communication negotiation and accommodation across culturally specific idioms. This final section focuses closely on the granular level of the posts: lexico-grammatical variations that occur on the discussion forums. As noted in Chapter 1, such variations have been well-described in ELF research, not only in general ELF communication but specifically in academic ELF: “Grammatical deviations from Standard English are a regular feature of English as a lingua franca” and are also “well represented” in academic ELF (ELFA), too (Mauranen *Exploring* 122-3). These common ELF features have been shown not to disrupt the comprehension of the turn or flow of communication. As illustrated below, analysis of common variations in the composition MOOC discussion spaces shows similar results. Even further, data from this project also adds weight to the conclusions from investigations into how ELF deviations from ENL show meaningful variations, as opposed to idiosyncratic errors (Dewey, Mauranen *Exploring*, Ranta). In particular, as noted in Chapter 3, this view of seeing difference as meaningful instead of as error will be shown through four examples of lexico-grammatical features: variations in article use, variations in prepositions and particles, *researches* as a count noun, and *make* as a generalized verb.

The point of examining these variations, ultimately, is to show how communication successfully proceeds and to show that these variations are a norm among global English speakers. Considering composition spaces beyond this MOOC, writing instructors who have not been prepared to work with students on these features can take them as indications of greater

deficiencies in fluency or communicative effectiveness. As Mauranen states, “Along with non-standard accents and a high proportion of dysfluencies, non-standard core grammar is easy to notice and apparently influential in forming people’s judgements on the linguistic ability of a speaker” (Mauranen *Exploring* 122). Students also make similar judgements, discounting classmates’ views based on an assessment of “unacceptable” grammatical fluency (McCorkle *et al* 61). That is to say, that while these lexico-grammatical features may not be salient in terms of how they affect communication in online discussions among participants, they are salient in terms of how their appearance can be interpreted by instructors and thus worthy of note.

When considering variations, one has to ask what is the standard from which these results vary, and in much ELF research, this project included, the answer is that the features vary from a standard, native-English-speaker form of the language. This comparison can seem antithetical to the entire ELF endeavor, which strives to decenter native English speakers in favor of global English speakers. If the ENL form of comparison is used to make judgements of quality of an utterance, claiming its success or correctness based on the form that ENL speakers would assumedly use, then the comparison serves a deficit view of speakers who use the variation and positions them as learners who have not yet fully acquired the language. On the other hand, comparisons to ENL forms can illustrate how a range of variations are used to successfully communicate. This latter use of native speaker standards fits the ELF paradigm: examining what variations global English users employ in successful communication. As Ranta describes, “native speaker speech is not a yardstick against which ELF speakers’ speech is evaluated..., but, of course, it provides a kind of baseline data for researchers to see what in ELF is different or, indeed, similar to NS speech” (“Syntactic” 88). Thus, the analysis presented

below compares the variations in light of native speakers' expectations in order to show a range of options rather than to illustrate errors on the part of the discussion forum participants.

The following sections will present and examine the grammatical and lexical variations of ELF occurring in these discussion forums in articles, prepositions, and word forms. These variations have been well-researched not only in ELF generally but also in academic ELF communication. The results in this project in many ways concur with previous findings about academic ELF communication, particularly the extensive work in this area by Mauranen, who compared data from a corpus of ELF academic communication with a corpus of native-English speaker academic communication. The last section will discuss the response to these variations, which follows a “get it done” stance.

### **Variation in Articles**

The three English article—definite article *the* and indefinite articles *a* and *an*—are among the most common words in English, both in native speaker and ELF settings and including academic discourse (Dewey 63, Mauranen *Exploring* 125). At the same time, articles are one of the most commonly noted non-standard variations noted in EFL (Mauranen 124), leading researchers to posit that the function of these determiners are changing in ELF environments; that is to say, not “that the indefinite or definite article is used less in ELF, but that the article system is being employed differently” (Dewey 63). In this study, the data from the discussion forums showed variations typical in EFL discourse: missing articles, unnecessary articles, and non-standard variations. These variations mainly fall into three trends connected to (1) the nature of the nouns the determiners modify, (2) redundancy used for emphasis, and (3) elimination for simplification.

**Missing, extraneous, and varied articles with count/noncount nouns** One of the article variations featured in the data is a lack of an article before a singular count noun, for example “I write on computer” instead of “I write on a computer” or, depending on context, “I write on the computer.” While articles are particularly complex, idiomatic, and difficult to describe regularly, this practice of using an article—definite or indefinite—in front of singular count nouns is perhaps the most consistent grammatical “rule” for articles in English. Despite this native speaker regularity, omitting articles in this environment was an evident feature on the discussion forums. In the instances below and throughout this chapter, X has been added to the original text to indicate the place of the missing article.

Do you think addressing this issue in a free online course will attract X larger audience and reach great numbers of peoles' (sic) minds and hearts?

We got X problem with it back home in Java/Sumatra, Indonesia.

Is it X common assumption that drug manufacturers want the end the disease that they are manufacturing medications to treat?

I must write that from X perspective of language matter, it makes a huge difference.

I don't always agree with him on religion or on socialism but he still paints X compelling idea of a possible future for humanity.

Laws in Spain are quite different from X anglo-saxon world, because we support our judicial decisions mainly in laws rather than in judicial precedents

Participants also *added* articles where they typically are not used in native English speaker phrases. For example, in the example below, the participant placed *a* in front of a plural noun:

Though I'm not very good at it, I've learned a great numbers of scrabble words.

The example seems to actually combine two common expressions, either of which would make sense in this context: “a great number of” or “great numbers of.”

A more common variation in terms of extraneous article use in the discussion forum posts was the use of the indefinite article *a* in front of a non-count noun, as in the following four underlined instances:

I am proud to have you here with us, so that we, teachers, can get a better instruction in how to implement automated screening in grading piles of written sheets for our sts<sup>8</sup>. I think my friend that automated screening will solve a problem but it sure will create other problems if used in other fields (example: the huge numbers of teams hired for the marking of national exams will be substituted by a simple software).

The teacher, whom we called as coach, gave me a rather hard training in the beginning.

I believe that almost all children have a huge potential in them, it just needs to be released.

The following example comes from a single participant in a single post, and it shows a consistent omission of the indefinite article before a singular count noun. At the same time, as in this post shows multiple instances of typical article use, including the presence of indefinite article before singular count noun, such as *a notebook*.

Take a notebook, write in X Excel sheet, whatever is convenient for you, but write every activity you do during your day.

It doesn't pay to complain that you are studying the whole day if you spent 2 hours eating, 45 minutes talking on the phone and X measly 1 and a half hours really hitting the books.

X Next thing which impressed me was the idea of X "calendar-kicker".

For this purpose you may use X standard calendar in X simple planner or business diary.

In all of these examples, variation in article use connects to the ENL classification of a noun as countable or uncountable. However, the different categorization of nouns as countable or uncountable varies across languages and across codified world English variations (Hall, *et al.*). Even within a variety of a language, the same noun can be treated as count or and non count

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<sup>8</sup> sts here is likely an abbreviation for *students* as the poster references teaching and the sts abbreviation is not uncommon in TESOL.

depending on context (e.g., the staffs of the two departments collaborated on the document). In some cases, typically noncount nouns can be individuated and treated as count nouns (e.g., she ordered three coffees). Jenkins (“Spread”) as well as Hall have both explained how the concept of mass nouns is a characteristic of global English use and uses of terms such as *advices* and *informations* are gaining acceptance globally, even in assessment situations (also see Mollin). Thus, this distinction of nouns in terms of countability is one area in which ELF distinguishes itself from native speaker norms, and variations in article use reflects that feature.

**Missing, extraneous, and varied articles in fixed phrases** Similar to the idioms examined in the previous chapter (and in some research, included within a broader definition of idiom), certain phrases have become set over time and can have less obvious connections to set grammatical rules. For example, a commonly taught rule for *the* is to use this definite article for specific references, either something previously mentioned in the discourse or something specific that is known in the context of the discourse. However, in the examples from the discussion forums, often fixed phrases use the definite article *the* in instances in which such a specific reference is not readily apparent, such as “the media.” In the instances below, brackets after the example indicate a native English speaker version.

There's a mesmerizing power in the repetitiveness of stockinette stitch worked in X round. [in the round]

I still can't understand why our government violate X rights of many citizens! [the rights]

While X media was wondering if this person is a boy or a girl the band quickly became popular in their country and all around Europe. [the media]

The data showed only one instance of missing indefinite article *a* in a set phrase.

As things stand I am at X loss over the direction to take. [at a loss]



**Article variation** The data showed one instance in which a non-typical article was used.

In the example below, *right person* refers to a specific individual (only one person would be right), thus the definite article *the* is typically used.

Except for the last option, which you are able to obtain regardless of time and place, you will find and enjoy the trip if you are accompanied by a right person.

Dewey posits that in ELF, article use connects less to idiomatic native speaker norms or qualities of the noun that follows the article, but the use connects more on salience of the noun reference in the discourse (66). In the examples below the posts use the definite article *the* in front of non-specific noun references and using *the* in front of a grammatically similar modifier (possessive pronoun). Following Dewey's claim, in these examples, the participant may be emphasizing the importance of childhood/children and the exhibit.

I believe imbibing moral values right from the childhood through these time tested methods of storytelling would certainly help the children to grow .....

I would like to use it as a link in my class to the your exhibit as part of storytelling and moral or values development.

Dewey's second explanation of definite article use is that such structural words are eliminated when they are redundant (principle of efficiency) and not needed to add extra salience. Dewey demonstrated this principle through examples where ELF speakers used *same as* instead of *the same as* (64). The MOOC discussion forums did not evidence the principle with *same*; however, a similar process may be at play with *next*, as in the two examples below. In fact, in the second example, the definite article is optional even by ENL norms.

Next thing which impressed me was the idea of "calendar-kicker".

I'm always home on a bike so next time you see a fat lady on a bike, wave hello, it's probably me!

**Combination of variations** The above categorization and examples distilled each instance into types of article use variation, yet it is not unusual for different variations to be used by the same participant in a turn, as the example below shows.

With the use of advanced Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning techniques, today we are able to predict the stocks and plan a war strategy. My area of study revolves around extracting meaningful information from X massive amount of data, thus helping the businesses and individuals gain an insight that can help to make better future decisions

When focusing on comparisons to ENL norms, most often the focus is on deviations from that norm. Indeed, ENL readers are more likely to consciously notice such variations in features compared to the instances where the participant's use conforms to norms. However, in examining the four norm-conforming use of articles (including zero-article) in the above example, it is worth also noticing that the participant conforms twice as often as they deviate. In the annotation below, the underlined noun phrases indicate the eight instances where articles are used according to ENL norms (including zero article uses).

With the use of advanced Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning techniques, today we are able to predict the stocks and plan a war strategy. My area of study revolves around extracting meaningful information from massive amount of data, thus helping the businesses and individuals gain an insight that can help to make better future decisions

In sum, the variation in article use from ENL norms is a common feature of ELF discourse and can be interpreted as an “ongoing shuffle of article functions” instead of as errors (Mauranen, *Exploring*, 125). Examining article use on the MOOC discussion forums in this light, the variations show ELF users employing articles to enhance prominence in discourse in some cases and eliminating them to exploit redundancy (Dewey). These two functions may be more salient to ELF users in terms of article use over qualities of the noun it modifies, such as classification of a noun. This reception of ELF article variation in terms of function instead of

error has implications for how writing instructors treat such variation when reading, critiquing, and evaluating, as discussed later in this chapter.

### **Variation in Prepositions and Particles**

Another feature in the discussion forum posts that reflects common ELF variations is the use of prepositions. Prepositions are function words that appear in front of a noun phrase, for example *She wrote in this book*, combines the noun phrase *this book* with the preposition *in*. As with articles, preposition variations are well-known in ELF: “Virtually every earlier ELF account that is concerned with structure tells us that prepositions are among the most commonly reported features that deviate from their conventional [English native speaker] use” (Mauranen, *Exploring* 124). Particles appear similar to prepositions, but a particle aligns with a verb before it to create a single meaning unit. For example, in the phrase *She wrote in a different candidate* the preposition *in* does not parse with noun after it to create a prepositional phrase—*in a different candidate* does not capture the meaning of the sentence—for the preposition goes with the verb to create the meaningful unit *write in*. Such verb-plus-particle constructions are called *phrasal verbs*. In the data from the MOOC, the discussion posts show instances of missing prepositions or particles, unnecessary ones, and variations in use.

**Missing preposition** In the following instance, the preposition is missing from the prepositional phrase. In this one example of its kind in the data, X has been added to the post to indicate the missing preposition, which is indicated in brackets.

You chose a very interesting area X expertise, and I like how your related it to a popular novel. This makes it more fun and easily understandable [of]

**Unnecessary preposition** A more common variation that appears in the posts is the addition of a preposition where one typically does not appear. Such prepositions are underlined in the examples below.

in addition I am going to start my new part-time engineering job from next week.

thank you for sharing about your project and also for your word of encouragement

Since that time I promised to myself that I will fight for love, because "you don't fall in love with a gender, you fall in love with a person".

The teacher, whom we called as coach, gave me a rather hard training in the beginning.

I have had the priviledge [sic.] to translate more than a dozen of books, lots of articles and studies for Christian seminars and authors from different denominations.

I will still make it even though I cannot effectively research on it.

The latter two examples illustrate ELF processes of generalization that other researchers have noticed in their work (Mauranen *Exploring*, Dewey). In quantitative phrases similar to *a dozen of books*, the preposition would be normal in ENL expressions—*a lot of books*, *a large amount of books*, *hundreds of books*. Thus, this case may represent a simplification of this kind of phrase of quantity. A similar process can be seen in the last two examples: if *research* and *promise* had been nouns, then the prepositions after them would have aligned with native English speaker norms (*to do research on something*; *to make a promise to someone*). Thus, this may be a case in which overgeneralization of this preposition use is at play, an overgeneralization of the preposition use with both noun and verb forms. Mauranen draws attention to how regularization in ELF may lighten the speaker's (discussion board poster's) cognitive load in places where the variation from ENL norms seems to be readily comprehensible and thus not interrupt the flow of communication (130-1).

**Preposition variation** Besides missing or unnecessary prepositions, another variation is the use of a different preposition than would typically appear in ENL discourse.

As a freelance researcher, I am interested in investigating and reflecting on my experience about researching and writing about history, in particular in connection with the use of first-hand sources such as interviews to witnesses. [with]

Teaching is my passion. Since the last three years, I have been tutoring English to kids from neighborhood; Under-privileged kids who could never have seen the face of a school otherwise. [for]

I have always been on difficult situations since I was born. [in]

You are right, our instructors should explicitly encourage students to share their work at the forum as much as possible. I'll probably include that idea on my first stage. [in]

Sometimes, people appreciate my ability to communicate in different levels no matter the subject. [on]

Since you were kind enough to drop by my thread, I'm repaying you the visit. But this is only to say that right now I have my hands full, and a slight headache on the making. [in]

Four of examples above, more than half, involve variations of the prepositions *in* and *on*. Mauranen's data on academic ELF suggests that *in* may be taking on the role of a "generalised preposition of time and place" as she found it occurring more frequently than prepositions such as *at*, suggesting that *in* is taking on the role of both prepositions (124). In the examples from the MOOC discussion forums, *on* occurs more frequently than *in* for places where prepositions are varied. Overall, Mauranen's analysis of preposition data shows a process of both simplification—one preposition doing the job where different prepositions may work—alongside increased complexity—greater variation in preposition use than in ENL norms (124, 130-1).

**Preposition and Particle Variation in Multi-Word Verbs** In the data on preposition and particle variation from the discussion forum, seven instances of non-ENL forms appeared in multi-word verbs. These phrases are typically idiomatic and relatively fixed combinations of verbs plus prepositions and particles; they are typically classified into three types (Bibler *et al.*

403). While all three categories are rather rare in academic discourse, both Biber *et al.* and Zareva have found that prepositional verbs are more common than the other two multi-word verbs in academic communication, possibly because they are not as informal as phrasal verbs. The data from the discussion forums echoes those findings.

***Prepositional verbs*** Prepositional verbs consist of a verb plus adjacent preposition. Each of those units retain at least some of their literal meaning even when combined, but the choice of preposition is limited to the verb (Zareva 175). The following examples from the MOOC discussion forum show preposition variation from ENL norms in these types of multi-word verbs.

**Prepositional verbs**

This standpoint was perfectly legitimate, as we thought, because when the future of mankind is at stake, the concept and attitude of precaution must prevail on any other consideration. [over]

The swollen black trash bags on sidewalks and road junctions have become part of our streets. Crows pick on them and leave behind the spewing leftovers. [at]

Thank you very much X the question [for]

***Phrasal verbs*** Phrasal verbs consist of a verb followed by a participle in which the meaning of the resulting phrase is idiomatic (Zareva 175) and often quite different than the meaning of the constituent parts. Phrasal verb variation occurred less frequently on the discussion forums than the prepositional verbs.

I don't want to sound complaining and disrespectful. That shouldn't be too hard, since I am appreciative of the effort they are putting on the class [into]

If you look at it technically one can figure out the character of the household by the garbage it throws X [away]

***Phrasal prepositional verbs*** The third category of multi-word verbs is phrasal prepositional, which is “a verb followed by an adverbial particle and a preposition” (Zareva 175).

As with phrasal verbs, phrasal prepositional verb variation appeared less frequently than the prepositional verbs.

Japanese is also made up X three different character sets. Hiragana, katakana and kanji [of]

Prof just took the joy off this assignment. [out of]

As noted in their descriptions, each of these types of multi-word verbs are relatively fixed and have varying degrees of idiomaticity. In each example from the discussion forums, the preposition variation is apparent because, but the variation does not change the meaning of the post. From ELF perspective prepositions and particles frequently vary from ENL norms, but as they do not trigger misunderstanding the vast majority of cases, participants generally do not attend to the variation and rather continue the discourse and focus on the meaning and goals of the interaction (Firth “Discursive”).

Overall, the data illustrated more examples of preposition variation than in particle variation. On the one hand, this is surprising because, as with prepositions, ENL phrasal verbs are notoriously idiomatic (Celce-Murcia and Larson-Freeman 425-6). One possible explanation for the lack of particle variation in the data is register since phrasal verbs are more common in informal registers and so in more formal domains, such as academics, single-word Latinate verbs are more common, for example using *cancel* instead of *call off* (Biber, *et al.* 408-9; Celce-Murcia and Larson-Freeman 435). Even when multi-word-verbs are used in academia, the prepositional verbs are more common (Biber *et al.*, Zareva).

### ***Researches and Make***

Other lexical and grammatical appeared throughout the results, including a common ELF overapplication of *make* and, common in academic ELF, using *research* as a count rather than a

noncount noun. The discussion below calls attention to the ELF processes that these two words illustrate: regularization and simplification. These two examples are worth highlighting here connect as they are common to academic environments and discussions, including those that take place in writing instructional environments.

**Variation in countability of nouns: the case of RESEARCHES** In the above discussion of articles, the distinction of nouns in terms of countability is one area in which ELF distinguishes itself (Hall, Jenkins “The Spread,” Mollin), as it regularizes more nouns to treatment as countable (Mauranen *Exploring* 126). Uses of terms such as *advices*, *informations*, and *researches* are gaining acceptance globally. In the discussion board data for this study, *advice* and *information* did not show any examples of this regularization; both lexical items appeared in the discussion board data, but in all instances they were used as mass nouns; that is, no plural forms appeared, and no indefinite article (*an*) was used with the singular forms. On the other hand, examples of *researches* emerged from analysis of the discussion board data as a specific feature.

I read several times that scientific researches show that knitting generates the same kind of brainwaves yoga does. Now, even though I know very little about brainwaves and trust even less scientific researches made to fill voids in newspaper, I know a lot about knitting and its powers.

though Montessori Method is 107 years old, even today it is widely used throughout the world. Many researches have been conducted to measure its effectiveness. The recent researches conducted by Angeline Lillard and Kevin Rathunde, show that Montessori children are better in executive functioning and social problem solving. It is also evident from their studies that the Montessori children are more active, strong, excited, happy, relaxed and sociable. Steve Hughes, a renowned neuropsychologist, exclaims that it is like an education designed by a gifted pediatric neuropsychologist!

I have lived in this region for over twenty years. As part of my work, I have conducted researches in many settlements around the region. I have associated with people of all walks of life living in this part of the world. I have seen them coming and leaving; researchers, politicians, businesspeople, journalists... I have attended meetings, negotiations, rallies... Yet the conditions are still the same.



The posts above display high fluency in English, and as such, the use of *researches* as a plural noun cannot be attributed to language ability and error. Rather, this feature is better treated as a legitimate, accepted evolution of global academic English.

**Variation in terms of approximation: the case of MAKE** One of the processes that occurs in ELF is a type of approximation in which a general term is used for a more specific one (Mauranen 104), and a typical example of that process is using a more general verb such as *make* instead of more specific ones, such as *create* or *develop*. In several places on the discussion forum, *make* stood out in non-ENL constructions. In the first example, *make* is doing the work of the more specific verb *perform*.

As a Computer Engineer I can communicate with machines, program them to make task, or take advantage of technology to improve procedures in any enterprise.

However, the other examples do not follow the expected trend of approximation and instead appear to illustrate other ELF processes. For example, two instances of *make* variation in the data appear to illustrate how ELF users vary English structures to suit needs for highlighting relevance (see also this function in variations of *the* earlier in this chapter). The first example below comes from an original post on the *ethos* thread.

We can make persuade them by our education and knowledge.

The participant had begun the post “I am an English language instructor and I am a persuader” and writes about the types of persuasion they use to establish ethos with students. In this context, the example above from the penultimate line of the post shows how *make* emphasizes the theme of persuasion in the post. A similar use of *make* to emphasize rhetorical appeals appeared on the Activity 6.1 thread.

The Franciscan adopts the "ethic of principles", while the Jesuit makes appeal to the "ethic of consequences"

This example comes from an original poster's reply to a comment who on their original post. In this turn, the participant uses a joke about a pair of friars to illustrate their point about principles and consequences of war. One view of this sentence could be that it is an erroneous version of "appeals" or "makes an appeal," yet an ELF interpretation show that while *make* appears redundant in these examples, this variation may be serving as a means of enhancing prominence, as in the cases Dewey noted with redundant definite article.

While the two examples of *make* in conjunction with rhetorical concepts appear to highlight those concepts in the discourse, the remaining variations of *make* do not show the same process.

Having two stages helps me focus on adjusting my tone, and selecting which topics will make to each version

I utterly mirror myself in the description you make of yourself up to "and act on things instead of just thinking about them."

After reading through the recommended text I realised the subject I chose was far too scientific than my knowledge and training afford. However, I believe I have a valid point to make (My point is gender imbalance predisposes communities to several problems including in this case, risk of disease as demonstrated by the Aids epidemic in Africa). I will still make it even though I cannot effectively research on it.

While the earlier example shows a simplification of the phrase *make it*, the use of the phrase in final example illustrates a number of possible processes. The overall post shows a number of sophisticated expressions that do conform to ENL norms with little variation, including with the verb under examination here, *to have a valid point to make*. On the one hand, the use of *make* in the last sentence can be seen as an approximation in the sense of *make it as accomplish something*. On the other hand, an equally general verb *do* would fit into the sentence, although that choice would be an even greater approximation in that *do* lacks focus on accomplishment.

The variation in these examples of *make* support Mauranen's preliminary findings that while *make* can be seen as an approximation, corpora examination of spoken academic ELF and of academic English in the US do not illustrate that process clearly (104). Thus, *make* deserves continued examination to observe and understand its use and its implication for the evolution of the English language. For now, it stands as an example of the complex processes at work in ELF. As with all the examples noted, the variations may distract novice ELF readers, but they do not block comprehension and at the same time illustrate complex language processes at work and cannot be simply attributed to errors and lack of language proficiency.

### **Mixed Variation**

Of course, in many utterances a variety of non-standard expressions appear. In the examples below, some of the variations shown are verb agreement, word forms, and un-ENL-idiomatic expressions.

People are displaced either internally, that within their country of origin or across the borders as refugees. Need not to say that during the displacement terrible violations perpetrated by warlords and uncontrolled armed groups scattered in the bushes throughout the region.

Why for so many years the world has remain indifferent to the plight of these people? Why local leaders have continued to sow division among their own people?

I do lots of teaching to community health workers, midwives and nurses, and also Liscenced Medical Practictioners with non-profit organizations. I have teached them many difficult topic, and methods that against some traditional cultures that is impossible to be accepted by the trainees. But when I tried, as a medical professional and experienced trainer, finally they accept what I suggest. Most of the time, I used quoted paper, sometime personal experience.

At the same time that the examples evidence grammatical variations from an ENL norm, they also show rhetorical techniques in the forms of connecting devices, contrast for effect, appeal to pathos, rhetorical questions, etc. This balance of local variations within global comprehension is a feature that most ELF research calls attention to; as noted before, ELF

researchers seek to see how interlocutors communicate across differences and attending to the overall meaning in the face of variations is a central theme. In Firth's seminal research on this topic, he notes that "most often participants 'do work' to divert attention from the 'surface' features of talk and are differentially able to disattend to encoding difficulties and linguistic infelicities" ("Discursive" 253). In the examples here, the 'work' Firth describes is represented by the rhetorical techniques participants employ in their posts, the work of rhetorical writing in a learning environment such as this MOOC.

### **Response to Variation**

In the MOOC responses, participants attend to the work at hand and disattend to apparent disfluencies such as indicated by the lexico-grammatical variations discussed in this chapter. As noted earlier, this behavior is in line with ELF research and tenets. In other words, the norm on the MOOC discussion boards is to respond to the content of posts instead of pointing out or correcting variations. The two examples below demonstrate how two participants attend to getting work done across variations: the first shows a short exchange with feedback focused tightly on rhetorical concepts. The second exchange among multiple participants about the post's topic on language learning.

This first example is from the *Ethos* discussion thread and features the extended original post by Participant A (ellipses mine for length, not the original poster's) and the feedback the participant received, which consists of one reply by Participant B.

#### **Participant A: Ethos Time-management**

We are all pressed for time Everyday we complain about it and would love to have a couple extra hours just for ourselves. Do you know how many hours you have left with? You think millions? Think again. In general between 200 000 and 400 000 depending on your age.

I've been studying time-management for 5 years now. Having 2 majors and 1 minor made me think where I spent my time on a regular basis. I started from the simple book ["Time-drive" of our Russian time-management guru Gleb Arkhangelskiy](#). My passion ignited. I spent the rest of the month reading voraciously in this area, trying to implement new techniques and improve my life. Here's a few simple rules to get you started from that short book

The first thing you have to do is to take a critical look at how you spend your time. Take a notebook, write in Excel sheet, whatever is convenient for you, but write every activity you do during your day...It doesn't pay to complain that you are studying the whole day if you spent 2 hours eating, 45 minutes talking on the phone and measly 1 and a half hours really hitting the books.

Next thing which impressed me was the idea of "calendar-kicker". It's a kind of a deadline clock on our Coursera site. It's the simplest thing but its power is truly amazing. Take a simple calendar for the whole year where you have months and days in one piece. ... You will immediately notice that the half of the year almost gone by now. For this purpose you may use standard calendar in simple planner or business diary. Every day cross out the day out. In no time you'll start feeling the passing of time, it's pressure and if you still postponing that call to the dentist or your dream trip to the Caribbean, probably, you'll make some changes in your life.

I would like you to stop wasting your time and start doing something. Start from something small, but do it everyday. Like crossing out the day in your calendar to feel that it's really gone in the evening.

Participant B: This was a perfect blend of Ethos, Logos and Pathos. However the domain you chose had much less of "extrinsic" ethos. You tried to demonstrate your credibility through your way of looking at life and time management rather than claiming to be a motivational speaker or some expert of similar kind. But by the end of the paragraph, the readers will take you as an expert - by the intrinsic quality you displayed.

The passage was motivational. Thanks for sharing.

Participant A: Thank you for sharing your thoughts! I didn't look at this piece that way at the beginning. Since it was a short exercise I didn't spend much time working on it.

In this exchange, the original poster shows several non-native variations in grammatical form, including instances article, preposition, and particle variations as discussed earlier, as well as sentence boundaries, missing auxiliary verbs, spelling, and phrases un-idiomatic to native-English-speaking ears. However, the responder does not note these variations; instead, the responder attends to original poster's expertise. The responder does the work at hand, focusing

on rhetorical concepts, on how the original poster employed them, and what effect the piece had on the responder. An additional point of interest in this example is the focus on *ethos*, for one way of discussing language correctness in writing instructional environment is how language correctness imparts on readers a sense of a writer's *ethos*, how "correct" the language implies expertise and care and thus trustworthiness.<sup>9</sup> Examples in ELF from communication among diverse participants puts that implication and practice in doubt.

The same content focus across variations shows in the second example, which involves four participants, the original poster and three respondents, and shows more interaction in the discussion about the post. Participant D shows the most ELF variation in their turns, and participant A, B, & C mostly confirm to ENL forms with little variation.

Participant A (original poster) Assignment 1: Ethos

(disclaimer: I wouldn't normally write like this but it's what the assignment asks for) English is big business. People all over the world spend billions and billions of US dollars annually to learn it. Unfortunately, most people are doing it wrong. For over 15 years I've been teaching English, most of that time in highly-ranked Korean universities, and I've seen many of the perceived best and brightest of Korea also doing it wrong. My MA in Applied Linguistics and my ongoing EdD in Applied Linguistics confirm what my experience has shown me -- people generally approach learning in the wrong way and this wrong-way approach is amplified when learning English. It kills me to watch studying, measured in money and hours, which doesn't improve English but rather kills motivation and hinders eventual success.

Participant B: As a language instructor myself, with over 25 years experience teaching young adults and adults, I find echo in what you have written. Learning English, or any other language, has nothing whatsoever to do with quantity but rather with quality. It is more often than not that extra effort you put into it: how devoted are you to your training and learning? How independent are you? How autonomous are you? Do you really enjoy it to the extent that you are willing to sacrifice all else to devote yourself to your activity? Are you willing to walk that extra mile?

Participant C: @[ B]: You have posted some thought provoking questions and as a fellow educator and instructional designer I concur with what you asked. As an ID [instructional

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<sup>9</sup> Such an assumption generally holds true in formal academic writing contexts. There are other contexts in which deviations from academic language norms works more appropriately, and some writers will introduce "incorrect" language to resist dominant language register ideologies (e.g., Smitherman, Canagarajah).

designer] I have often been in situations where providing better instructional or training solutions became a tougher [sic]

Participant D: But...but... but...[A]...what then is the right way and what is wrong with the wrong way?

We would like to know, please, from your stock of Ethos...please divulge a little...

A: Sorry I haven't commented here. For some reason this thread flew off of my radar

[B] you're very much right and in line with contemporary research, or least the contemporary research that I go by. It takes a massive amount of time and the correct type of effort to do it. The core concepts are mindset, expertise and expert performance, and grit.

[D] the right way and the wrong way? It's subtly different for everybody and it really depends on the situation that you are in. But, the right way involves time and deliberate practice all with the correct attitude...

That is just an example, but it's always necessary for the learner to consider how much learning is being done and how effective different approaches actually are.

D: I was wondering about the interplay of the learner's 'learning intelligence or learning style and the materials being handled or taught [A].

Thank you elaborating your ideas for me, this also is helpful

A: [D].

This is a very complicated area on some levels, easy on others. There is a large body of research on learning styles,

[long post about learning styles, mindset, grit, self-regulated learning, and teaching]

I'm sorry for this rambling and long message. This is my passion and it often gets the better of me..

D: I am so happy, [A], that you chose to respond at length, for what you have said is both valid and interesting.

I guess that I imagine that each student has their own starting point and perspective. Each has become habituated to learn/not learn through particular triggers and immediate performance is not an indicator of long term success (of course, that term in itself is so subjective)

I have gained new lens filters to look at the whole matter through, and for that I thank you. If you have good online resources to direct me to, so that I may learn more both of the good and the de-bunking, I would really appreciate it. Thank you.

ESP classes? Not what I am thinking....?

A: ESP = English for Specific Purposes.

I don't have much in the way of online resources, but if you want an overview:

[gives links to work by Angela Duckworth]....

D: Thank you [A]. I appreciate the links given...off to watch Angela :)

As noted before the example, Participant D shows the most variation in their posts, yet as the interaction with D is the most active in this exchange, it appears that the variation does not interfere with the goals of the exchange in discussing the topic of the post. The exchange proceeds without explicit miscommunications or attention to language forms. This let-it-pass, make-it-normal, get-it-done focus means that participants do not call attention to ELF variation (“disfluencies” in Firth’s work). The participants do not display explicit corrections of non-understandings (“you mean that....” “I don’t quite understand but...”), and, as noted in chapter 3, the posts demonstrate few if any ELF preemptive strategies to avoid misunderstanding such as co-constructions. This lack may be in part due to the asynchronous nature of the posts, but part may be due to this focus on getting things done, which is the main response of participants in the face of ELF variation.

Participant D positions themselves as a learner but not specifically a language learner. While Participants A, B, and C all draw direct attention to their own expertise in the field of teaching and instruction, Participant D gives little information about themselves. The points in D’s posts could come from another teacher, a learner, or from someone not involved in the field of education. Even while D is requesting more information about “the right way” to study a language, D positions themselves as an interested party and an adept communicator in English. Participant A’s response to D is an active involvement in the matter at hand, the topic of language learning, but A does not “attend to the disfluencies,” as Firth would say, but responds actively to the topic of the conversation. This exchange is a clear example of work in ELF showing that “[f]or the most part, however, these linguistic anomalies [ungrammaticalities and disfluencies] do not pose an obstacle to achieving successful communicative outcomes” (Kauer “Intercultural”).



However, as noted in earlier chapters, determinations about responses in this study are limited because the form of the data does not allow for understanding why some posts attracted responses and others did not. The large number of participants on this MOOC and the optional nature of the forums means that not everyone responded to others and that many posts have no responses at all. In the *ethos* thread, responses generally consisted of confirmation of the original poster had said (as in the first example of this section) or consisted of a discussion about the topic if not the rhetorical concept of the thread (as in the second example). In the *Activity 6.1* thread, which was a space to comment and gather ideas, several posts also received no responses. It is tempting to question whether “what kind of, and how much, anomalous and marked usage can be tolerated by participants before intersubjective meaning is rendered impractical,” as Firth (“Discursive” 247) muses in his seminal work on this topic. However, in the MOOC discussion posts correlations between English language variation of the original post with a number of responses did not appear. This is to say that it is not possible to determine, or even suppose, a threshold of amount or degree of variation with response; in other words, how much variation or what kinds of variation became too problematic for participants to respond. The question remains outside the scope of this study, as it did for Firth. Instead, the focus is on how the participants successfully work across the variations.

This study asks “What features of English language variations (that some may consider errors) do participants use when discussing writing in an instructional space? How do participants respond to such variations?” Across the discussion forums, many lexico-grammatical variations appeared. The analysis here focused on articles, prepositions and particles, and also discussed uses of *researches* and *make*. These variations are common in ELF

speech and writing, including in academic domains, and are noticeable features that writing instructors and students encounter.

Some may argue that the features discussed here are not English user variations but rather are English learner errors. In traditional approaches to second language acquisition, variations from native-speaker norms are treated as faulty forms resulting from the learner's inaccurate or incomplete acquisition of the target language. In this view, the non-native-speaker forms represent the learner's *interlanguage*, which lies in a space between the speakers' native language and the target language. As Lightbrown and Spada elaborate, "Analysis of a learner's interlanguage shows that it has some characteristics influenced by previously learned languages, some characteristics of the second language, and some characteristics, such as the omission of function words and grammatical morphemes, that seem to be general and to occur in all of most interlanguage systems. Interlanguages have been found to be systematic, but they are also dynamic, continually evolving as learners receive more input and revise their hypotheses about the second language" (80). For example, in an interlanguage view, the use of *researches* as a count noun would be an example of a characteristic that occurs in most interlanguage systems, and as the learners obtain more experience with the language, they would turn to using the word as a count noun as native English speakers do.

However, ELF decries such interpretations of lexico-grammatical variations as this approach resists treating native-English-speaker forms as the goal. ELF takes a descriptive stance in investigating how ELF speakers communicate in English across variations, including in the strategies and forms they use to achieve their communicative goals (Jenkins, Cogo, and Dewey 284). When the forms differ from ENL norms, ELF researchers look to see how those forms are treated, and, in fact, note that not only will many participants in ELF discourse not attend to such

features, but that they may sometimes endorse them in pursuit of communicative efficiency. As a participant in Hülmbauer's study on correctness and form in ELF declares, "We don't take the right way. We just take the way that we think you will understand." In sum, when viewing non-ENL forms from a language learner stance, such deviations are treated as errors and deficiencies, whereas from an ELF stance, the variations are seen as legitimate variations. In ELF, if native-speaker variety is not the goal, variations cannot be—or, at least, not only be—errors.

The preceding lines pushed the error/variation distinction a bit too far: ELF interpretations do not mean that all variations are legitimately error-free:

One of the accusations frequently levelled at ELF researchers is that they are promoting a policy of 'anything goes.' This misconception is caused primarily by the fact that, the actual outcome of ELF and EFL may be the same forms reached by different routes.

However, the claim that certain forms that are habitually labelled 'errors' in EFL may be variants in ELF is based on solid empirical evidence. In particular, the forms occur systematically and frequently, and without causing communication problems. Besides, ELF researchers have never claimed that there is no such thing as a *non*-proficient ELF speaker. ELF speakers, just like EFL (and, for that matter, native English) speakers, come in a range of proficiency levels. Some are expert...others are still learners, and yet others have ceased learning some way short of expert ELF level (Jenkins, "Points of view" 141)

Thus, for much of the analysis in this chapter, the forms under discussion are those that have been researched by ELF scholars; they are features well-established—or in the process of being established—in quantitative ELF research (Dewey, Mauranen, Ranta). Thus, in taking an ELF perspective, the variations from the MOOC discussion board analyzed here—article use to enhance prominence or eliminate redundancy, prepositions generalization, countability of nouns,

and generalizations of verbs—can be seen as further evidence of legitimate global English language variation rather than as treated as deficit learner language.

Examining variation of these features from the MOOC discussion boards in light of ELF research shows underlying motivations to the non-native-English-speaker variation that go beyond error and indicate linguistic processes of language change. This reading of variation allows for interpretations that eschew a deficit stance focused on error and rather provide a focus on successful communication across variation. As noted in Chapter 1, writing instructors, and, indeed, the field of composition is actively engaged with perceived issues related to multilingual student writers' variations in ways that question work with and/or towards a presumed prestige variety of academic English. Understanding how variations work at a global level informs that engagement in ways that can further support a focus on students linguistic and rhetorical strengths. This interpretation further eschews problematic conflation of grammatical accuracy with competence.

Responses to the variations support the ELF tenet that participants focus on the goals of exchanges and not on variations in language use. The participants in their written posts on this online MOOC engaged in practices seen in other ELF, mostly oral conversation, studies that showed how speakers focused on avoiding miscommunication and saving face across language differences rather than drawing attention to language forms. Participants in ELF communication invest work to avoid communication problems, and this 'do[ing] work' is also representative of learning, though not of a traditional concept of language learning. Firth has proposed a distinction between *being a foreign language learner* and *doing language learning* as he asks "How, if at all, is 'learning' oriented to -- by the participants, in their dealings with one another... where L2 instruction is *not* the order of the day, and where the development of L2

competence is *not* the main incentive or the official reason for engagement within the setting?” (“Doing” 131). Setting aside the implication that L2 competence involves primarily lexico-grammatical exactitude, which slights pragmatic and rhetorical aspects of a language, the work that the participants in the MOOC are *doing* in terms of composing and rhetorical skill supersedes the linguistic variations in form. In fact, the work is not only done by non-native English speakers, but also by the native speakers, as they do the work to read the content, avoid misunderstanding, and adapt their own discourse to the global community. Reading past disfluencies to attend to the goals of the interaction through responding to content is *doing language learning*. In this case, this process is shown by doing, and thus learning, the strategies, such as not attending to lexico-grammatical variations and other adaptations noted in the previous chapter in terms of developing intercultural awareness.

## CHAPTER 7

## CHALLENGING MONOLINGUALISM IN U.S.-BASED WRITING COURSES

**Introduction**

As The Ohio State University was preparing to run its first iteration of its Writing II: Rhetorical Composing MOOC, the instructional team was surprised to find that almost three-quarters of the enrolled participants were from outside of the US. They had originally assumed an audience of students similar to those at their home university (Halasek *et al.* 158) and had not anticipated that such a global audience would be attracted to this kind of OWI opportunity. The OSU team responded quickly to adapt the course accordingly, including the addition of activities aimed at examining linguistic diversity, a feature not regularly incorporated into US higher education writing courses. Matsuda has called attention to the monolingual, English-Only assumptions that tacitly underlie composition in the US: “the dominant discourse of U.S. college composition not only has accepted English Only as an ideal but it already assumes the state of English-only, in which students are native English speakers by default” (637). Matsuda was challenging that assumption a decade before the MOOC went live, yet strong calls for attention to linguistic diversity and English language variation had appeared in the field even before that. For example, the *CCCC Statement on Students Right to Their Own Language* in the wake of Martin Luther King Jr’s assassination included a primer on the sociolinguistics of language dialects. Such calls to examine, even resist, the supremacy of one idealized language variety continue today, as exemplified by the chair’s address at the 2019 CCCC, in which Asao Inoue calls for stances towards students that value their language and writing beyond white rhetorics.

University writing spaces in the US are full of linguistic variety, but tacit assumptions of linguistic homogeneity of the students and as primary goal of such courses persist, which means

that writing courses are designed in ways that promote the supremacy of a particular variety of English (i.e., white, native-speaker, academic) instead of understanding that variety as one among many and of developing skills to deploy and negotiate among varieties. In sum, the continued calls wrestling with linguistic diversity in US writing studies illustrate the value of continuing research within composition to interrogate stances towards languages, to investigate the communication across language varieties, to “build intentional cross-cultural connections and relationships with others so to pose and solve problems collaboratively and strengthen independent thought,” and “design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes.” Those last two points come from NCTE’s 2008 definition of 21st century literacies, and indeed, to prepare students to work with cross-culturally and globally, awareness about language, particularly the position and varieties of English across the world, is essential. Bringing that those understandings to fruition works to ensure that future US composition professionals are not surprised at the international diversity in their instructional spaces and have designed those spaces with language diversity as the default. While many forces in composition and the teaching of writing work against such a change—from teacher preparation to administrative assumptions—the work in this study adds weight to the continued call for evolution of pedagogical practices.

This chapter begins by reviewing the results and bringing together the themes of this dissertation study of language attitudes, accommodation across international English language varieties, and ELF lexico-grammatical variations. Then, after addressing the limitations of this current study, the discussion will turn toward the implications of these results for US-based writing instruction, which illustrates ways in which raising language awareness will enhance all

students' abilities to engage with diverse global audiences. Finally, the chapter will outline areas for future research that can build upon this work.

### **Language Attitudes, Accommodation, and Variation**

The work in this dissertation has examined global English language users' participation in the discussion forum space of a MOOC dedicated to rhetorical writing instruction. This 2013 MOOC ran during the heyday of MOOCs in the mid-2010s, and thousands of participants from around the world joined the course. As a MOOC with strong connectivist elements, communication through the peer reviews and discussion forums allowed participants to engage with each other on topics related to course concepts and connected to current writing projects. While the MOOC was US-based, the majority of its participants were located outside of that country and self-identified as multilingual. The size of this MOOC, its connectivist features, and its population of global participants created a rich site for examination into how ELF users adapted and accommodated their language as they wrote to other global participants. The fact that the participants were not primarily positioned as language students, as English learners, but rather as legitimate English language users allowed for insights into how ELF communication about writing and rhetoric proceeds across language variations, which can lead to insights for US-based composition's continued struggle with language diversity.

This study examined two discussion forum areas; one related to discussion of a rhetorical concept, *ethos*, and another dedicated to giving and receiving advice about potential topics for a writing project, *Activity 6.1*. The analysis of the data started by finding features in the discourse and then examined those features in light of this study's research questions. The features emerged from coding the turns on the discussion forums according to those findings already well-established in the ELF literature while also noting and coding new features that arose during



the analysis. The results of this analysis concluded that participants expressed understanding and valuing of English language variation across time and geographic locations, and they demonstrated accommodation in use of culturally-laden language forms for the global audience through uses of idioms in the forums. Throughout the forums, deviations from ENL norms occurred, but in these forum spaces, the flow appears to continue with attention on the communicative goal rather than on the non-ENL variations. Each of these three findings have been detailed in the previous three chapters and are summarized below.

In terms of the attitudes about global English language variation participants expressed in discussions about writing, which directly addresses the first research question driving this work, MOOC participants' explicit mentions of language—either language in general or English in particular—showed tension between standard and correctness. On one hand, participants mentioned *correctness* and *accent neutralization*, and on the other hand, they expressed recognition for *the evolution of English* and *appreciation/understanding of variation*. The latter seems to prevail, even in posts that start out to be about standards.

In terms of what accommodation strategies participants used to communicate across English language varieties, which was this project's second research question, their treatments of idioms illustrated how participants worked to ensure comprehensibility of these culture-laden, mostly-fixed, often opaque expressions. Instead of strictly avoiding idioms, as some intercultural communication advice suggests, participants showed different levels of awareness as they employed these culturally-tied phrases in a globally diverse group. While some participants used multiple idioms with no accommodation, other participants accommodated their idiom use through calling attention to the idioms through formatting (quotation marks, italics) and/or through paraphrasing the idioms proactively. The accommodations suggest that the territorial

imperative, which Seidlhofer calls attention to as a problem when ELF speakers use language in a way to indicate membership in a specific (native, fluent) speaking community to exclude others, can actually work to indicate membership in a globally diverse community. By accommodating idiom use instead of avoiding them, participants are able to express local identities in ways that communicate with a global audience.

In terms of the third and final research question, which concerned features of English language variations that participants use when discussing writing in this instructional space, lexico-grammatical variations abound. This study chose to examine articles, prepositions, and particles generally and the cases of *researches* as a count noun and *make* as an overgeneralized verb in particular. These are features that can appear as errors when their use on the discussion forums departed from ENL norms, but many of the instances of variation show an underlying logic that matches trends at work in researched areas of ELF. The responses to the variations demonstrate cooperative principles of ELF communication, in particular a focus on “get it done” as established as Firth and reaffirmed by the body of ELF research to date. While participants do not use features such as articles according to ENL norms, they show ELF-fluency in their variations and responses.

Across the results for these three areas of focus for the study, several themes appear. One is an emphasis on fluency as ELF users rather than as native US-English speakers. This theme appears as the explicit attitudes regarding variations of English, as the preemptive accommodation in use of idioms, and as the dis-attending to lexico-grammatical variations as participants focus on the communicative goals on the discussion posts. In composition instructional spaces, control of language generally involves (consciously or unconsciously) native speaker norms/standards of fluency. The results of this study promote the stance that when

in global spaces—or even in US spaces with linguistically and culturally diverse students—writing instructors and administrators consider ELF fluency, that they recognize and value accommodation for a globally diverse audience, and that they notice how variation does not always indicate error. All these considerations work to avoid conflating language with intelligence and resist deficit orientations towards students. They also encourage all English language users, including native English speakers, to attend to global realities.

### **Limitations**

Some of the main limitations to this research connect to the discussion forums. As noted at times throughout this dissertation, analyzing the response to global English language variations proved difficult, in part due to the varying rates of responses to posts and in part due to the nature of the data collected. As to the latter, the discussion forum data came as a single text file, which was divided into turns and put into a spreadsheet that could then be analyzed using NVivo. The transmutation of the data meant that it was difficult to reconstruct conversations, only occasionally possible in the multi-turn discussions presented and analyzed in results chapters four, five, and six. The technological arrangement of the discussion forum of MOOCs has also been shown to affect responses (Bloch 168; Gililand, Oyama, and Stacey). With so many participants, whichever discussion board posts rise to the top of the screen would attract more responses. Some MOOC platforms and courses arrange the posts chronologically, either newest to oldest or oldest to newest; others used an algorithm that put the posts that had already garnered responses at the top, which tended to attract more responses.

Despite the technological difficulties, it was simply impossible to ascertain the reasons why some posts attracted more responses than others. One way in which this limited the study is that little conflict or overt misunderstanding appeared in the data from the discussion forums

from this study, and thus ELF strategies for communication repair could not be examined. To further examine negotiation strategies, it would be useful to see how participants expressed and resolved misunderstandings that appeared to be a result of language variation.

Another limitation of the study was that the discussion forums examined were optional spaces, so while the discourse represented motivated participants and generally successful ELF users, they were spaces in which other participants could easily refrain from joining. This optional character was useful in that it likely represented successful and motivated users, those who sought engagement with a global audience in English and used communication strategies to negotiate across variations. At the same time, this self-selected subset of participants may not be representative of the group. In research on ELF strategies, researchers have called attention to how behaviors may change when the stakes in the communication are higher. That is to say, participants in an interaction may be less tolerant of variation and make fewer moves to negotiate understanding in situations where a contract or a grade or other stake is at hand. These kinds of situations include business negotiations, or graded coursework even—as the main form of feedback and evaluation in the MOOC—peer reviews.

Other limitations include the type of discourse on discussion forums. Informal and conversational spaces show more tolerance for variation than higher stakes (see above) and more formal genres of writing. Thus, further research into other types of written discourse in composition courses (see below) would investigate how ELF features and processes can apply more widely in writing instruction. Another limitation is that the coding was done solely by the researcher, and single-person coding could always hold error. Finally, as a non-credit bearing instructional situation, equivalence to a formal university writing class cannot be made, although

implications in terms of language awareness can be applied in local ways for varying situations, as discussed below.

### **Implications**

As with all ELF research projects, the results of this study have implications for pedagogy. The exigency for ELF research, as Seidlhofer noted in the early days of such efforts, was an apparent gap between the ways in which people used English globally and the ways in which the language was taught. Specifically, she called attention to how communication in English took place across different communities, increasingly in NNS to NNS communication without NS present, yet language teaching used NS targets with emphasis on getting language features “correct” rather than features and strategies that were most successful across varieties. As research into ELF communication developed, scholars were reluctant to offer pedagogical recommendations until a body of results emerged. As such a body has developed, ELF works have begun to tread into pedagogical waters and two main themes have emerged. Generally speaking, ELF scholars state that their research is not meant to determine “what should or should not be taught,” but rather they “feel their responsibility is to make current research findings accessible in a way that enables teachers to reconsider their beliefs and practices and make informed decisions about the significance of ELF for their own individual teaching contexts” (Jenkins, Cogo, and Dewey 306). And so it is with the research results from this study: how might attitudes toward global Englishes affect a US-based writing classes? What considerations about idioms and other culturally-based language forms and topics are appropriate in writing course design? In what context and to what extent is it pedagogically appropriate to treat lexicogrammatical variations from ENL norms as a meaningful possibility rather than a distracting error?

However, despite the call for local decisions based on ELF research results noted above, ELF researchers do make recommendations, including an overarching suggestion regarding language awareness. In their review of ELF research a decade after Seidlhofer's original call for ELF as a field, scholars Jenkins, Cogo, and Dewey assert how language, especially English, needed to be taught not toward mastery of an abstract ideal but as it is actually used, and those ways may not reflect the idealized concept:

a fundamental initial consequence of ELF research is the need to raise awareness of the relationship between language models (which are necessarily abstractions) and the variable nature of language in interaction. From this perspective, developing an ELF perspective in pedagogy entails above all, at least for now, the generating of an understanding among learners and teachers of the inherent variability (even instability) of human language in general and English more specifically. (Jenkins, Cogo, and Dewey 306)

In order to do such work, ELF experts urge an active engagement with English variation, exposure to ranges of Englishes, less focus on language norms and more on communicative strategies, of plurilingual rather than monolingual approaches (Jenkins, Cogo, and Dewey, Seidlhofer "Research").

The pedagogical advisements by ELF researchers are almost always aimed at English language teaching. However, I argue that similar decisions are needed in US-based composition classes, an argument echoed by several in the composition field, such as Horner, and similar to others in composition encouraging approaches inclusive of student writers of diverse language backgrounds, such as Canagarajah. Working with insights from ELF research to inform local pedagogical decisions as well as encouraging greater language awareness among students and

faculty continues to have a place in discussions about US composition courses enrolling globally diverse students, a theme articulated in the opening chapter and further discussed below. Overall, raising both language and intercultural awareness is what I suggest here in light of the research from this dissertation.

In fact, raising explicit awareness about global English language use was one of the features OSU Rhetorical Composing's team implemented once they became aware of the global diversity of the participants in OSU's Rhetorical Composing MOOC and confronted the ways in which their conceived design of the MOOC had not considered such a population. Months before the MOOC began, Google analytics and demographic surveys alerted the OSU team to the diversity of the incoming participants, at which point they considered the variety of Englishes, language experiences, and educational contexts that the participants would be bringing to the writing MOOC (Clinnin *et al* 142). These realizations prompted the instructors to ask themselves how well the current design of their writing MOOC suited a linguistically and culturally diverse audience (McCorkle *et al* 55), at which point they uncovered and directly faced some of the US-based, face-to-face composition teaching assumptions that they had been making (Halasek *et al* 158). The OSU writing MOOC team consulted scholarship on international students, global Englishes, and multilingual writers; they met with second language writing experts; and they made several adaptations to the course in order for it to be more inclusive: "Given the globalized, diverse character of participants and the multiple interventions made possible by the MOOC platform, we responded by revising curriculum, assignment design, and pedagogical philosophy" (McCorkle *et al* 55-6).

The Rhetorical Composing team created a philosophy statement that "encouraged a respectful learning environment characterized by an open attitude toward a wide range of world

Englishes” (Clinnin *et al* 143). As they made the changes to the MOOC, the team were guided by principles of universal design for learning and participant design to craft an interactive, inclusive online learning space (Clinnin *et al*). One of the changes to shift the focus of the MOOC from an emphasis on English academic writing – arguably most relevant to a university student studying in that language – to an emphasis on rhetorical principles – including audience and purpose – that participants could apply to wider writing contexts (Clinnin *et al* 143).

The MOOC underwent several adaptations aimed at raising participants’ language awareness, explicitly “to emphasize the global makeup of our learning cohort to foster a stronger sense of community...and inform participants about various ways that people all over the world learn English” (McCorkle *et al.* 53). In other words, the instructors wanted to call explicit attention to the global and linguistic diversity of the participants in the MOOC. Thus, they created an additional initial module centered on the idea of World Englishes.<sup>10</sup> This module, included videos featuring multilingual English users and experts in the field of second language writing. The module also included the text of their philosophy statement as well as discussion spaces in which MOOC participants could share ideas from the modules and include their own experiences (McCorkle *et al.* 57). For even deeper engagement, the MOOC instructors offered optional activities guided by questions such as “Why talk about ‘World Englishes’ rather than ‘Standard English’?” “Has your opinion about World Englishes changed after interacting with the content, and, if so how...? What do you still have questions about? How will this impact your daily life?” (McCorkle *et al.* 62). These activities asked participants to become explicitly

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<sup>10</sup> In this OSU MOOC context, the term World Englishes refers *not* to the field of linguistics that examines and codifies variations of English around the world such as Singaporean English. Instead, the OSU MOOC uses the term World Englishes generally to refer to global English language variation, which may include the stabilized global forms of the language but also to less stable, more variable types of English.



aware of their ideas and stances toward global English language variation. The OSU Rhetorical Composing MOOC instructors also incorporated the world Englishes philosophy implicitly into the design of the peer review system, following best practices not only from composition but also from multilingual writing: explicit instructions, samples and practice activities, time, and editing capabilities for reviews (McCorkle *et al* 57-58).

The instructors of the MOOC describe the results of these reforms aimed at increased awareness and inclusivity of linguistically diverse participants as mixed. On the one hand, they noted that the participants discussed their own experiences with English language diversity without referencing the materials in the modules, so they did not observe ways in which many participants were incorporating the new information into their views. In the responses, one of the themes that emerged connected views of language variation explicitly to a language learner position: “the personal relevance of World Englishes, and the sharing of skills and knowledge [of language learning] based on personal experience” (McCorkle *et al.* 62). The other theme that emerged from that work puts aside the learner position and it highlights the legitimacy of the global diversity: participants demonstrated awareness of “the importance of recognizing and embracing language variations and individuals’ different positions” (McCorkle *et al.* 63). This understanding of language difference indicates an opening on which to explicitly build throughout the course. Participants could reflect and/or be prompted to recall ways in which their language awareness comes into play—and at times into conflict—during other moments in the OWI environment. For example, when participants consider editing their work, they might consider how their earlier expressed stance towards variation interacts with editing activities. The MOOC instructors themselves realized the importance of sustaining such positions, for they acknowledge that while they had intended for the awareness to percolate throughout the months

of the MOOC, they rather identified places in which participants expressed native English speaker ideologies that worked to the detriment of that initial World Englishes awareness effort. All the same, the example they set with their efforts and reflections about incorporating perspectives on English language variation in their MOOC serve as sound practices for US-based composition instructors to consider how they enact similar pedagogical activities for their local situations.

The experiences and efforts of the OSU Rhetorical Composing MOOC and the results of this study specifically suggest that infusing language awareness into composition courses would serve the objectives of preparing student writers and rhetors to participate in globally and linguistically diverse areas of the 21st century world. Those who have studied writing MOOCs have strongly suggested that these spaces hold the potential to inform brick-and-mortar writing courses (Clinnin *et al.*, Comer and White, Gilliland *et al.*, Head, Halasek *et al.*) as well as other, non-MOOC, university online writing instructional spaces. In that regard, courses could follow the OSU team's model by introducing a segment about language near the beginning of courses and returning to those ideas in other activities of the course, for example when considering the place and purpose of editing, which can recall attitudes expressed in the beginning of the course but also add considerations of English variation and determinations of error (and perhaps alternate views). Most current composition handbooks' sections on language emphasize elimination of mistakes, avoidance of errors, and embrace of a single standard language view. On the other hand, when focusing on edits in writing, course materials and instructors could bring attention to considerations about when editing formal, possibly to ENL normed, language is important, when editing is less important, and what criteria go into making those determination; Ferris sets up such activities in her chapter on self-editing strategies in *Language*

*Power: Tutorials for Writers*. These activities would introduce and give opportunities to consider both language attitudes and topics in language variation from ENL norms.

Readings in the course may demonstrate a variety of registers, dialects, and Englishes. For example, the anthology *Rotten English* contains works in which English variation is valued; one of them, “Betel Nut is Bad Magic for Airplanes,” demonstrates how the narrator’s internal voice is in a local variety of English and he switches into a more formal, ENL-similar variety when asserting authority. US university writing course anthologies such as *The research paper* “Ghostwriting and International Students,” published in a composition journal and written by two international students in a first-year-writing course in the US, not only demonstrates extended research paper writing skills and connects to topics useful to discuss in a writing class, but the article contains some editing deviances which can prompt a discussion about editing, standards, and expectations and connect to the issues raised in chapter six of this work.

Rhetorical analyses activities in composition classes also provide a space in which considerations of language and audience can connect to the themes from the results of this study. For example, analyses could consider references to events, cultural touchstones, and use of idioms to note assumed background knowledge of an intended knowledge. For example, in Stedman’s “Annoying Ways People Use Sources” in *Writing Spaces*, an online composition collection written by composition instructors specifically for university writing courses, he gives catchy names to the issues he examines. The references to Spiderman in those names would make sense to most world readers, but the name “armadillo roadkill” would be less so (how many people would learn those words in a second language?). With that vocabulary choice, the piece seems to be directed at a US audience. However, after the catchy references, Stedman explains each issue and its remedy in more common terms, and thus his points and advice about

source use are comprehensible to a wider audience. In discussion or analyses about that and other readings, instructors could call attention such cultural and linguistic characteristics and writing techniques that embrace or exclude globally diverse readers.

Some of these suggestions also address intercultural awareness, a potential Bloch (169) noticed in his analysis of writing MOOCs and one that Baker calls for across ELF spaces. Overall, such activities would interrogate beliefs about standards and English varieties with the goal of no longer seeing language in terms of right or wrong but rather of evolution and varieties that intelligent rhetors know about and can choose to use. This is not to say that anything goes or that, indeed, students would not revise and edit to ENL norms. Composition specialists who challenge standard language ideologies and embrace global English variation note a place for standard, ENL, academic writing instruction; they emphasize that such stances should not be taken without raising student writer awareness about how such standards are created, their contextual nature, and the role of negotiation and choice among variations (e.g., Asao; Matsuda and Matsuda).

As ELF scholars have highlighted, pedagogical implications suggested by research do not indicate a one-size-fits-all strategy, and thus the specific decisions about actions to raise language awareness of global English lie in the hands of local writing programs and instructors. In this light, faculty also deserve access to raising their own language awareness and access to ELF research, such as the results here, to make decisions about actions that would suit their own students, whether or not their local populations feature globally diverse students. Clinnin *et al.* calls attention to how such understandings can benefit all students as they declare how as instructors they can build on and model language awareness:

Rather than tolerating others who speak English as a second, third, or fourth language, we can seek out their first-hand expertise .... We can, further, develop our own willingness to model the open attitude toward linguistic experimentation and risktaking.... And we can take the time, in every class, to speak about the different varieties of English that exist in the world and that are practiced daily. If we have English-language learners in our classes, these discussions will signal our appreciation of their efforts. If we have no such students in our classes, these discussions will serve to educate native English speakers about the necessity for an open and accepting attitude toward language learning in increasingly globalized, and often digital, communication contexts. (Clinnin *et al.* 157)

Beyond access to research as noted above, opportunities for faculty to reveal their own language awareness and consider pedagogical strategies for their courses could include faculty seminars and mentoring, access to conference and research activities, grants to finance curriculum and material development, and access to such materials. Including language awareness as well as ELF research in teacher training is also paramount. Having second-language writing faculty and staff in writing programs can enhance such efforts to resist monolingual stances and raise understanding of multilingual writing scholarship and practice (Dadak, Shuck) as composition as a whole continues its grappling with language diversity.

These recommendations for faculty development are particularly important in light of forces that uncritically accept standard language ideologies. This advice challenges threads of belief about language and writing instruction that are woven into all corners of the university, from students to writing instructors to administrators – all reflecting language beliefs held commonly around the world. Standard language ideologies hold strong sway, seen in the belief

that language, and student writing, is degrading. Such claims have appeared consistently in public and pedagogical discourse dating back centuries (Greene, R. Jenkins).

### **Further Research**

As discussion forums represent less mediate, less formal written discourse, one option for further research would be to repeat the discourse analysis from this study with the peer review exchanges required activity of the MOOC. Because it is required, more participants can be represented, still including a good mix of diverse language users. Because it has higher stakes (as the main source of feedback and evaluation in the MOOC), there is more potential for clashes when language variations do or seem to cause problems. Throughout the OSU MOOC, participants commenting on peer review noted the presence of NNES in ways that differed from the attitudes towards variation evidenced on the discussion boards examined here (McCorkle *et al.*). McCorkle *et al.* describe how some of the complaints about peer review expressed outrage that a peer reviewer whose grammar varies from ENL norms would comment on the grammar of the text they were reviewing. Further research could examine these attitudes as well as ELF strategies for critique in order to better understand what language attitudes arise in writing instructional activities involving more of the MOOC participants in a higher-stakes activity. Peer reviews, along with other ways in which peers give feedback on writing, are not only a common activity in composition classrooms, giving critique can be culturally and linguistically sensitive. Pragmatic norms for critique vary globally in terms of directness, for example. Also, in peer review formats in which the author can reply and ask follow-up questions of the reviewers could be insightful in terms of ELF interaction and potentially illustrate instances of miscommunication or of communication repair in ELF that were not evident in the data for this study.

As this study connects ELF to an ENL-based writing and rhetoric course, the drafts and polished versions of formal writing appear to be an obvious area for examination. Some of the questions that could be investigated with such work could be to what extent the final texts conform to local English needs or to what extent they move toward ENL norms—or whether participants revise in such a way to be sensitive to a global audience. Studying the texts in this way could be similar to research such as Poppi’s investigation regarding newspaper articles written in English for a local audience in countries not traditionally deemed ENL. This work could be of interest to ELF scholars considering how their work applies to written genres, an area that the field has generally resisted examining because of interest in in-the-moment decisions and adjustments to communication. However, examinations such as Poppi’s and Lorés-Sanz’s has shown that ELF is applicable to more formal written spaces.

Another area of research that could be of interest to ELF researchers would be to compare the features noted here to those in the ELF corpus of written academic work, WrELFA. WrELFA consists of academic work in somewhat less mediated written genres than edited, published work. WrELFA is a corpus of writing from spaces that hold direct response (conversation), for example, examining the comment sections of academic blogs as opposed to edited journal articles and terminal degree papers. Would the same findings about language attitudes, use of idioms, and get-it-done grammatical work be at play? Likely, yes, but to what extent and to what variation? In other words, further research into these aspects in a larger sphere of academic work could reveal to what extent the findings here are generalizable to academic written interaction outside of the composition field.

Rounding out this list of possible future research in this area is an examination of the effects of language awareness activities on attitudes towards, negotiation within, and treatment of global English variation in US-based writing instructional spaces.

All of the works noted above, as with this dissertation study, would aptly respond to the calls for research into how culturally and globally diverse English language users interact in writing instructions spaces, such as academic writing MOOCs, with an aim at better understanding such interactions and using those insights into writing pedagogy on a wider scale through multiple decisions at the local level made by informed composition faculty.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, this study has applied English as a Lingua Franca paradigm to discourse centered on writing, specifically to two discussion forums from a US-composition writing MOOC. In examining how global English language users from a variety of linguistic backgrounds discuss writing, this study has found insights into what attitudes toward global English variation participants hold, how they accommodate their use of idioms to a culturally diverse audience, how lexico-grammatical variations can reflection logics of ELF use, and how participants focus on content over form to achieve goals of communication. Even while these findings come from an optional, often informal section of written communication in the MOOC, they evidence strong potential for the inclusion of language awareness activities in other US composition instruction spaces. Such work aims to create US university writing courses that more equitable and effective for a global audience, including helping domestic US students develop important intercultural skills to participate in culturally and linguistically diverse arenas.



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## APPENDIX A

## CODES FOR ANALYSIS

**Codes for Initial Analysis (based on previous ELF research)**

Code	Explanation	Detail (from ELF research)
LEXI	Lexical variations; variations in word forms	<p>“Words that are unusual, unconventional, or unquestionably deviat...[such as] <i>our other basic industry paper pulp it was sucessing as well</i>” (Mauranen <i>Exploring</i>)</p> <p>Plural forms for normally count nouns</p>
GRAM	Grammatical variations	<p>Dropping 3rd person present simple -s</p> <p>Mixing relative pronouns who and which</p> <p>Omitting definite and indefinite articles where they are obligatory in ENL and inserting them where they do not occur in ENL</p> <p>Failing to use correct forms in tag questions</p> <p>Inserting redundant prepositions (Cogo and Dewey)</p>
IDIOM	Idiomacity Instances when a post conforms technically to ENL normed word form and grammar, but distinctly not ENL in style and flavor	<p>Overusing certain words of high semantic generality (Cogo and Dewey)</p> <p>Overdoing explicitness e.g., <i>black color</i> (Cogo and Dewey)</p>
MULM	Multimodal resources Use of features afforded by online discourse	such as video, emojis, links, .gifs (Myer)
REO	Rephrasing - other rephrasing	When a participant rephrases another participant's post, or part of a post, to check or facilitate understanding
RES	Rephrasing - self rephrasing	When a participant rephrases their own post, or part of a post, to check or facilitate understanding
COC	Co-constructions	When a participant completes another participant's utterance.
REQ	Requesting moves	When a participant explicitly asks for clarification.

### Emergent Codes from Initial Analysis

Code	Explanation	Example (excerpts from posts)
<i>LANG</i>	Explicit mentions of language in general or of English in particular	<p>it is common sense today to know that language has power,</p> <p>I felt in love with translation (English-Spanish) a long time ago.</p> <p>English is big business. People all over the world spend billions and billions of US dollars annually to learn it. Unfortunately, most people are doing it wrong. For over 15 years I've been teaching English,</p> <p>English is my second language so i get the mother tongue interference..</p>
<i>LOC</i>	References to location	<p>I don't live in the US so don't know what Whole Foods is</p> <p>Where I live (Malaysia) \$400 is considered a lot of money and would be above the average monthly wage. I have to keep that in mind when I reply to posts from people who live in higher GDP countries.</p> <p>As research for my paper, can you tell me how social media is treated in Tunisia?</p>

**Codes for Analysis (based on initial analysis)**

Code	Subcodes	Example (excerpts from posts)
LEXI	RESEARCH Variations in which <i>research</i> is used as a count noun	Many researches have been conducted to measure its effectiveness.  I read several times that scientific researches show that knitting generates the same kind of brainwaves yoga does.
	MAKE Variation from ENL norms	We can make persuade them by our education and knowledge.  As a Computer Engineer I can communicate with machines, program them to <u>make</u> task, or take advantage ...
GRAM	ART - article variation from ENL norms	As things stand I am at loss over the direction to take.  I would like to use it as a link in my class to the your exhibit ...
	PREP - preposition/particle variation from ENL norms	in connection with the use of first-hand sources such as interviews to witnesses.  Thank you very much the question
IDIOM	Idioms Multi-word, opaque, institutionalized phrases	I have my job cut out for me  you stuck your neck out on this one
LANG	Explicit mentions of language in general	It is common sense today to know that language has power,
	ENG - English Mention of English in particular	I felt in love with translation (English-Spanish) a long time ago.  English is big business.

## APPENDIX B

## IDIOMS ON MOOC DISCUSSION FORUMS

36 idioms across 43 uses (7 are repeated more than once)

Are you willing to walk that extra mile?

walk that extra mile to achieve your goal

I really appreciate your passion and willingness to go the "extra mile".

You're very much in line with contemporary research

We have to proceed in line with the rhetorical appeal of the PSA announcement

Their course offerings re more in line with the type of course I am developing

A walk on the wild side every now and then

my walk on the wild side last year

the "ebb and flow" of ideas

cycles of ebb and flow in terms of participation.

I get off on tangents often enough in discussions here

I could go off on a real tangent here

Having tennis lesson and playing with other players go hand in hand.

you work hand in hand with people

Sometimes the dialog goes off track, etc

I have my job cut out for me

you stuck your neck out on this one

Back to square one under a new thread.

we are going to turn this bus around

The cat is out of the proverbial bag.

every cloud has a silver-lining.

My first grade teacher hit the nail right on the head.

I've gone down a bit of a rabbit's hole on the research.

Modeling can open doors...

My character I consider to be a failed musician who never set a foot in the door.

There is really, isn't there, nothing new under the sun, ....

It broke my heart to hear

I have to put my hand up

Certainly, doing so gives you a kind of "leg up" on the research that you might want or need to do

...you seem to have a good handle on how..

step back and look at the bigger picture.

7 years down the line we have proof

They did however draw the line at coming to work wearing rival companies logos

I'm familiar with Ricoeur, and Ehrman rings a bell, though that's all.

Since that time I promised to myself that I will fight for love, because "you don't fall in love with a gender, you fall in love with a person".

extremely important to have knowledge of both languages in a nutshell be bilingual,

it is after all a house of cards

for some reason doesn't seem to strike the chord it once did

I'm going for what I hope packs the most punch

Time will tell, though – it's a complex issue

"Washing dirty linen in public" does not help anyone

## APPENDIX C

## IDIOMS IN MICASE AND MOOC

Idioms occurring 4 or more times in MICASE; <b>bold</b> indicates that authors believe these are good ones to teach in EAP (from Simpson and Mendis)	# times in MICASE	# times in MOOC discussion forums <i>Italics indicates approximation of the fixed idiom or idiom that uses similar terms</i>
<b>Bottom line</b>	17	0
<b>The big picture</b>	16	2 Know when to say, "I think we're reaching the limits of what we can do with a taxonomy of this <i>stuff</i> or simply, as you point out, when to step back and look at <u>the bigger picture</u> .  <i>our comment opened my eyes to <u>the larger picture</u></i>  <i>the full picture is never truly known.</i>
<b>Come into play</b>	14	0
What the hell	12	0 <i>Because I feel like it, and <u>to hell with what</u> the neighbours think.</i>
Down the line	11	1 7 years <u>down the line</u> we have proof that by simple (hah! :)) planning and with playful development a child's potential can be unleashed to a great extent.  <i>you're very much right and <u>in line with</u> contemporary research</i>  <i>we have to proceed <u>in line with</u> the rhetorical appeal of the PSA "announcement"</i>  <i>their course offerings are more <u>in line with</u> the type of course I am developing</i>
What the heck	10	0
flip a coin; flip side of a/the same coin	10	0
on (the right) track	9	0 <i>Sometimes the dialog <u>goes off track</u>, etc.</i>
knee-jerk	8	0



Idioms occurring 4 or more times in MICASE; <b>bold</b> indicates that authors believe these are good ones to teach in EAP (from Simpson and Mendis)	# times in MICASE	# times in MOOC discussion forums on ethos  <i>Italics indicates approximation of the fixed idiom or idiom that uses similar terms</i>
<b>hand in hand</b>	8	2 this exposure have contributed to enrich my knowledge as you work <u>hand in hand</u> with people that have enormous amount of field experience.  Having tennis lesson and playing with other players have to go <u>hand in hand</u> .
right (straight) off the bat	7	0
<b>carrot(s) and stick(s)</b>	7	0
<b>Draw a line (between)</b>	7	1  They did however <u>draw the line</u> at coming to work wearing rival companies logos  <i><u>a line</u> I'm having difficulty walking myself right now..</i>
On target	7	0
Thumbs up	7	1 I'd like to just jump in to give an enthusiastic " <u>two thumbs up</u> " to your initial post
Fall in love	6	1 Since that time I promised to myself that I will fight for love, because "you don't <u>fall in love</u> with a gender, you <u>fall in love</u> with a person".
Out the door	6	0 <i>My character I consider to be a failed musician who never <u>set a foot in the door</u>.</i>
rule(s) of thumb	6	0
Take (something) at face value	6	0
Beat to death	5	0
Put the heat on	5	0

Idioms occurring 4 or more times in MICASE; <b>bold</b> indicates that authors believe these are good ones to teach in EAP (from Simpson and Mendis)	# times in MICASE	# times in MOOC discussion forums on ethos <i>Italics indicates approximation of the fixed idiom or idiom that uses similar terms</i>
A ballpark idea/guess	4	0
Come out of the closet	4	0
full-fledged	4	0
<b>Get a handle on</b>	<b>4</b>	1 you seem <u>to have a good handle on</u> how to get your work published.
Goes to show	4	0
nitty-gritty	4	0
<b>On the same page</b>	4	0
Ring a bell	4	1 I'm familiar with Ricoeur, and Ehrman <u>rings a bell</u> , though that's all.
<b>Split hairs</b>	4	0
Take (make) a stab at	4	0
Take my/someone's word for it	4	0
<b>Go off on a tangent</b>	3	2 I could <u>go off on a real tangent</u> here  I <u>get off on tangents</u> often enough in discussions here
<b>In a nutshell</b>	3	1 extremely important to have knowledge of both languages <u>in a nutshell</u> be bilingual,
<b>Ivory tower</b>	3	0
<b>Play devil's advocate</b>	3	0

Idioms occurring 4 or more times in MICASE; <b>bold</b> indicates that authors believe these are good ones to teach in EAP (from Simpson and Mendis)	# times in MICASE	# times in MOOC discussion forums on ethos  <i>Italics indicates approximation of the fixed idiom or idiom that uses similar terms</i>
<b>hand-waving</b>	2	0
<b>Came into play</b>	1	0
<b>Get a grasp of</b>	1	0
<b>Litmus test</b>	<b>1</b>	0
<b>Shift gears</b>	<b>1</b>	0
<b>Thinking on my feet</b>	<b>1</b>	0

## VITA

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## EDUCATION

Doctor of Philosophy in English, May 2020  
 Old Dominion University Norfolk, VA  
 Concentrations: Rhetoric, Writing, and Discourse; Applied Linguistics

Master of Arts, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), May 2001  
 Monterey Institute of International Studies Monterey, California  
 Certificate in Language Program Administration

Bachelor of Arts in Russian Area Studies, June 1992  
 Dartmouth College Hanover, New Hampshire  
 Certificate in Environmental Studies

## EMPLOYMENT

International Student Coordinator, Writing Studies Program, American University, August 2003-present

Instructor, English as a Foreign Language Program, Georgetown University, August 2001-2003

Academic Field Director, WorldTeach, Makow Makowiecki, Poland, Summer 2003

## PUBLICATIONS

"Navigating the Global and the Local in Writing Assessment." (2015). In Fuad Abdul Hamied, Idia Bagus Putra Yadnya, and I Gusti Ayu Gde Sosiowati (eds.) *Developing Indigenous Models of English Language Teaching and Assessment* (pp. 161-170). Denpasar, Indonesia: Udayana University Press.

"CCCC Statement on Second Language Writers and Writing" (expanded and revised; November 2009). Susan Miller-Cochran,<sup>[1]</sup> Christina Ortmeier-Hooper, Michelle Cox, Deborah Crusan, Kevin Eric DePew, Haivan Hoang, Jay Jordan, Paul K. Matsuda, Jessie Moore, Gladys Scott and Steve Simpson.

"No ESL Allowed: A Case Exploring University and College Writing Program Practices." (2004). In P.K. Matsuda, C. Ortmeier-Hooper, & X. You (Eds.), *The Politics of Second Language Writing: In Search of the Promised Land* (pp. 94-108). W. Lafayette, IN: Parlor Press.