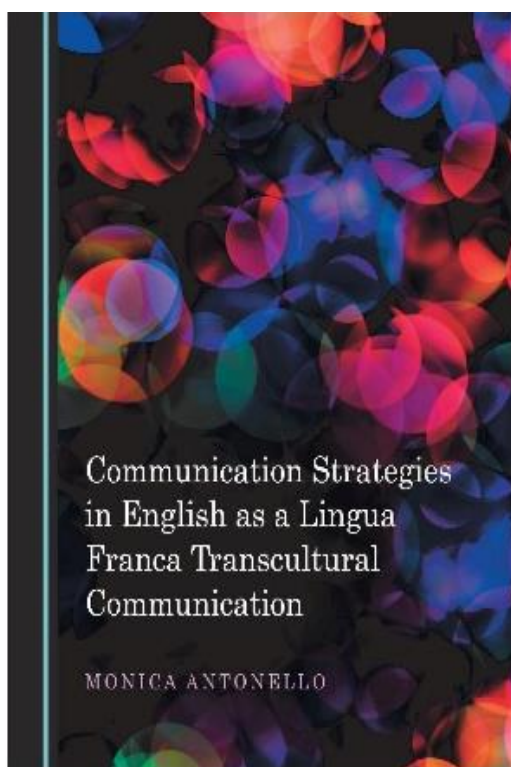


BOOKS

Monica Antonello, *Communication Strategies in English as a Lingua Franca Transcultural Communication*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2023, 330 p.



In an increasingly globalized economy and cosmopolitan society, teaching and training tomorrow's specialists brings new challenges for the (foreign) language teachers. ESP (English for Specialized Purposes) tutors in particular need to pay attention to the way they prepare their students and improve upon their foreign language skills, so that young graduates can easily find insertion in the labor market. In some specific domains, such as Tourism, where interaction with both natives and foreign speakers of English can be a regular if not daily occurrence, mastering an average level of English and demonstrating some degree of intercultural communication competency may no longer be enough.

Which specific variety of English should students today know and be expected to use? Is the Native Speaker standard still the golden model foreign users of English are supposed to emulate? What is the

difference between having ICC (Intercultural Communication Competence) training and mastering Transcultural Competence? Should English tutors focus on teaching ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) or ESL (English as a Second Language)? What methodological and didactic implications will this have for the ELT (English Language Teaching) modules future teachers are to follow? Monica Antonello's 2023 book, *Communication*



Strategies in English as a Lingua Franca Transcultural Communication, provides ample and well-informed answers to these questions, bringing forth a new perspective on the specific nature of the (verbal) interaction between speakers when English is just a mere medium of communication. The author also proposes English teachers a reevaluation of the role traditional Standard English model and Native Speaker proficiency goal should play nowadays in a world where most of the time, and in most contexts, interlocutors do not share the same linguistic or cultural background, nonetheless they still use English as a common currency for communication and mediation.

Divided into five chapters, the book opens the first one with an ample discussion of the role English has today as a lingua franca and its mediatory role in Intercultural Communication. The key word ELT or even ESP teachers should have in mind today, from a linguistic perspective, should be a paradoxically sounding *fluid normativity* regarding the type of English they should teach and encourage their students to use. According to Monica Antonello, we could consider accepting and using nowadays, in a globalized and increasingly heterogenous world, a spectrum of English varieties. Language and even culture cannot possibly be conceived any longer as monolithic, immutable entities. On the contrary, everyday practice and the need for efficient transcultural communication leads us to viewing English as a continuum ranging from the traditional (and outdated in Antonello's view) Standard English model, passing by ENL (English as a Native Language), and moving on toward 'World Englishes' (varieties of English as spoken in countries where it is the second language).

From a pragmatic point of view, (that of a Tourism ESP teacher in this case), demanding that for example a future Romanian tour guide or travel agent still insist on Standard English with a RP (Received Pronunciation) inflection as a target for efficient communication with a Japanese or Argentinian tourist, will be highly unrealistic. The reason for this is that the interlocutors do not share the same ethnic identity, the same cultural and linguistic baggage which will allow them the possibility to identify with or appropriate what an ideal, but imaginary "Native Speaker" model would produce in a typical English context.

This above-mentioned example is given from the perspective of an ESP teacher preparing students for a job in the hospitality industry (the author of this review); it nonetheless illustrates Monica Antonello's theory that nowadays the internationalization of English as a means of communication between interlocutors who do not share it as a mother tongue or even the same cultural background, comes with substantial consequences and changes that create the necessity for a new pedagogical framework for teaching both English and intercultural communication, the latter being ideally transformed into transcultural competence.

This particular use of English "as a common means of communication between people who do not share the same linguistic and cultural background, and thus negotiate meaning in order to co-construct mutual understanding" (Antonello 2023, p.11) constitutes the definition of English as a Lingua Franca and renders it intrinsically intercultural. Serving the communicative needs of various communities around the world, English should also be allowed to be diverse, thus rendering the (British) national Standard English model obsolete, since it cannot reflect a global reality. We cannot speak any longer of a singular, clear-cut, both geographically and linguistically, 'speech community'. The a priori categories set aside, the new ELT community will have to base its

communication on in situ meaning-negotiation and construction of mutual understanding through interaction.

“ELF communication creates a space where practices and meanings are negotiated, combined and merged, by continuously constructing, de-constructing and negotiating language norms and cultural practices.” (Antonello 2023, pp. 27-28)

Taking these points into consideration, the first chapter ends on a reiteration of the paradigm changes going from the Intercultural Communication’s functional (post-positivist) approach in the 1980s to the 1990s’ interpretative (constructivist) framework, then the critical paradigm, ending by the realist approach. The author has delineated each stage noting how the notion of ‘culture’ was interpreted and the consequences this had on language learning. Very useful for new students of this domain is also the distinction drawn by Monica Antonello between *cross-cultural communication* (which views culture as a fixed and homogenous system that is shared within a single community, still being separate from others), *intercultural communication* (which sees culture in interaction, negotiated by the interactants of the communicative act), and last but not least, *transcultural communication* (where culture and communication are perceived as fluid, ever-evolving, encouraging an analysis across cultures and communities).

From our point of view, the second chapter carries the heaviest load in terms of the theoretical construction of ELF Transcultural (Communication) Competence. With a focus on meaning-negotiation and co-constructing mutual understanding between interlocutors set in diverse or even divergent linguistic and cultural frames, the chapter emphasizes the need for mastering communication strategies and mediation skills. Monica Antonello goes beyond the normative descriptions of Communicative Competence and Intercultural Communicative Competence as these no longer satisfy the requirement of modern-day communication in a transcultural context. In this novel situation, where language is always dynamic, mutable and complex due to compartmentalized cultures, the new framework she proposes is a four-dimensional one. The four pillars of her ELF Transcultural Competence are: 1) *Translingual & Transcultural Awareness* that language and culture are fluid, dynamic systems; 2) *Comprehension and Production skills* (developed around the ability to use one’s own linguistic resources); 3) *Strategic Communicative Interaction Management* (referring to the active use of communicative strategies to negotiate meaning), 4) *Creativity* (meaning the ability to use one’s linguistic and cultural resources in an imaginative and novel way to create meaning by going beyond normative descriptions of language).

The third and fourth chapters address mostly linguists interested in analyzing the precise way communicative strategies (defined as tools that actively co-construct mutual understanding and negotiate meaning) are used by speakers to reach successful communication. The methodology applied to analyzing two corpora data (the VOICE-Leisure sub-corpus and the ViMELF corpus) is presented in the 3rd chapter. A mixed method approach, both a qualitative one (based on Conversation Analysis) and a quantitative one (based on descriptive statistics of the use of communication strategies in ELF transcultural contexts) has highlighted how ELF speakers use the following strategies to maximize communication: backchannels, lexical anticipation, lexical suggestion and correction, overt multilingual resources, reformulation, repetition, spelling to clarify meaning.

Chapter five brings forth the applied pedagogical perspective to these theoretical considerations, being of most interest to ELT and ESP teachers. In order to have

students that are well-prepared and adjusted to a global economy and cosmopolitan society, teachers should be aware of the need to develop ELF Transcultural Competence in their ELT practices. Ideally this awareness should start in Teacher Training programs, and then trickle down to students' teaching. To accomplish this, ELF pedagogy should center first around developing awareness-rising activities regarding linguistic and cultural variability, underlining the way communication is heavily influenced by the interdependence between language and culture. The students' receptive and productive skills should be measured not only by Standard English, but teachers should also accept 'World Englishes' and ELF, thus admitting a fluid normativity. ELT teachers should also emphasize the role communicative strategies have in developing interaction, mutual negotiation and construction of mutual understanding, which are the hallmarks of ELF Transcultural Communication Competence. The students' creative use of English should no longer be frowned upon but embraced as a necessary step in fostering efficient communication, with diversified multilingual forms and repertoires in multicultural, diverse speech contexts.

The exact means used to achieve all these can revolve for example around telecollaboration in classrooms where students from authentic transcultural contexts can learn about and practice intercultural communication, observing how language and culture moderate each other. Projects like *eTwinning* - online platform collaborations in European schools are given as examples. Students from various countries exchanging emails, working on common projects or just chatting, might be a simple but efficient step-up from the more traditional, old-school pen pals and classroom role play. Taking class trips abroad would encourage students to note unfamiliar pronunciations, expressions, varieties of English and give them a chance to practice various communicative strategies. Role plays, debates, interviews (guided by the teacher) would also encourage practicing meaning-negotiation and mediation techniques so much needed in intercultural / transcultural communication. The creative use of English should allow students to overcome the biased 'native' / 'non-native' speaker binomial, because after all, language is not monolithic but flexible, and its ultimate goal is efficient communication, irrespective of unrealistic, bookish standards.

From theory to linguistic corpora data analysis, passing by classroom practice that would help both teacher and students' training, Monica Antonello's book offers a well-rounded approach to understanding the role of English today in a globalized and cosmopolitan world. Addressed mostly to linguists and language teachers, her study sees English on a continuum, focusing on a spectrum of varieties of 'Englishes' to be used in efficient transcultural communication where meaning is mutually created and negotiated by speakers coming from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This particular approach to what learning and speaking English should be like nowadays is very useful and supportive, encouraging both ELT / ELF teachers and students alike. More efficient communication and understanding is just what our diverse world needs today!

Roxana MIHELE 

Senior Lecturer, Babeş-Bolyai University
Cluj-Napoca, Romania
E-mail: mihaela.mihale@ubbcluj.ro