

English as a Multilingua Franca and ‘Trans-’ Theories

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ABSTRACT

The research field of English as a lingua franca (ELF) is concerned with global communication among English users, in which English is most often a part, not the whole, of their communicative repertoires. The notion of English as a multilingua franca (EMF) repositions English within multilingualism to foreground multilingual situations, influences, and practices inherent in global encounters (Jenkins, 2015). This paper attempts to further the theoretical development of EMF in light of the theories du jour in applied linguistics, namely the ‘trans-’ theories of translanguaging and transmodal, transcultural communication. A review and integration of literature on these areas makes clear more similarities than differences between EMF and ‘trans-’ theories, which together highlight the limited role of any named language, mode, or culture in both online and offline interactions at a global scale. It is hoped that beyond any ideologically fixed construct, future research in the ELF field explores how English users collaboratively (or uncollaboratively) take advantage of wider multilingual, multimodal, and multicultural resources while engaging in translingual, transmodal, and transcultural practices.

KEYWORDS: English as a lingua franca (ELF), English as a multilingua franca (EMF), Translanguaging, Transmodal communication, Transcultural communication

要旨

「共通語としての英語(ELF)」という研究分野は、英語使用者間のグローバルコミュニケーションを扱っているが、その中で英語は、往々にしてコミュニケーション全体を占めるわけではない。英語を多言語主義の中で捉え直した「多言語主義における共通語としての英語(EMF)」という考え方が提唱されているが(ジェンキンス, 2015), その意図は、グローバルな遭遇に内在する多言語的状况や多言語的影響・実践を前景化することである。本稿は、最新の応用言語学理論であるトランス理論(トランスランゲージング, トランスモーダルコミュニケーション, トランスカルチュラルコミュニケーション)に照らして、EMFのさらなる理論的展開を試みる。これらの分野の文献を統合的に研究することで、EMFとトランス理論は相違点よりも類似点が多く、両方とも、グローバルコミュニケーションにおいては(オンラインで行われる場合もそうでない場合も)、特定の言語・伝達様式・文化の役割が限定的であるという側面を強調している。今後のELF研究では、イデオロギーによる固定的構成概念を超えて、英語使用者がいかにして協同的(あるいは非協同的)に幅広い言語、伝達様式、文化を垣根なく活用しているかを探求していくことが望まれる。

キーワード: 共通語としての英語(ELF), 多言語主義における共通語としての英語(EMF), トランスランゲージング, トランスモーダルコミュニケーション, トランスカルチュラルコミュニケーション

1. INTRODUCTION

English as a lingua franca (ELF) is a relatively new research field in applied linguistics, which in turn is commonly defined as “[t]he theoretical and empirical investigation of real-world problems in which language is a central issue” (Brumfit, 1995, p. 27). A major real-world problem for ELF scholarship is how English users communicate with each other effectively around the globe, where it is estimated that over 7,000 languages are spoken (Eberhard et al., 2021). English is an additional language for most of them, and as such, multilingual influences on English have always been a crucial part of ELF descriptive work (see, e.g., Seidlhofer, 2017). The linguistic phenomenon observed is also called ELF, which traditionally refers to “any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option” (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 7, emphasis removed).

Recently, ELF research has started to question the a priori demarcation of the English language. In reality, most participants use English resources as a part, not the whole, of their communicative

repertoires. A landmark publication is Jenkins (2015) on English as a multilingua franca (EMF) in this journal of *Englishes in Practice*. Now we frequently see “multilingualism” and “EMF” in ELF publications even if they are mentioned in passing. EMF posits that multilingualism is “the one single factor without which there would be no ELF” (p. 63). Its working definition is: “Multilingual communication in which English is available as a contact language of choice, but is not necessarily chosen” (p. 73).

Even though Jenkins (2015) does not suggest the name change from ELF to EMF, it is undeniable that naming creates power structures (Hawkins & Mori, 2018). The renaming of ELF to EMF as a notion, and possibly also as a research field, would arguably serve as a catalyst for further theoretical development. Unlike ‘lingua franca’, which denotes the contact between speakers of different first languages (L1s), ‘multilingua franca’ would mean a shared language in a multilingual situation, irrespective of participants’ L1s (Ishikawa, 2017). It follows from this understanding of EMF that while English is not the sole working language, it is also an option among speakers who share the same L1. In fact, English is increasingly introduced as a medium of instruction outside Anglophone settings, and an English-medium classroom in Japan, for instance, may consist entirely of L1-Japanese speakers.

The present paper discusses the potential cross-fertilisation between EMF and currently prominent theories in applied linguistics, and specifically, translanguaging, transmodal, and transcultural communication. While multilingualism in EMF underscores the ideological nature of the boundaries between named languages, translanguaging features the synergetic use of available meaning-making resources. It seems that EMF, together with translanguaging, invites us to look at the tension between ideological and pragmatic considerations by going beyond the English language. It also seems that ‘trans-’ theories encourage EMF to go beyond language and consider culture and communicative mode as well. This is because communication is not just about language, but also about how meaning is created and interpreted in an integrative manner. The following section deals with EMF, and the subsequent sections examine EMF in relation to translanguaging (Li, 2018), and in relation to transmodal, transcultural communication (Baker & Sangiamchit, 2019), respectively.

2. ENGLISH AS A MULTILINGUA FRANCA

The ELF field, again, has sought to comprehend how English users communicate in a multilingual world. Statistically, 388 million Anglophones of different origins, including monolinguals, constitute a tiny minority of an estimated 2.3 billion English speakers (Crystal,

2019). English functions alongside other languages in multifarious domains, including academia, business, and digital communication. The unprecedented spread of English requires a rethink of communicative resources and practices. Regarding communicative resources, ELF corpora, such as the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English – VOICE (Seidlhofer, 2004), the corpus of ELF in academic settings – ELFA (Mauranen, 2003), and its additional written corpus – WrELFA (Carey, 2013), have attested that monolingualism in English is no longer the norm. Instead, ELF corpus analytic studies illustrate that communication is contingent on multilingual influences and effects across linguistic levels, such as phonology, grammar, lexis, pragmatics, and discourse structure (e.g., Cogo & Dewey, 2012). As Mauranen (2018) puts it, “the best solutions [for mutual understanding] need not be the most standardised-like or native-like ... [or] even English” (p. 114).

As regards communicative practices, ELF ethnographically informed studies have demonstrated that mutual understanding derives from linguistic accommodation or adjusting and adapting language use according to the situation (e.g., Dewey, 2011; Jenkins, 2000). Put differently, participants, including Anglophones (Sweeney & Zhu, 2010), need to use linguistic resources flexibly and dynamically in order to fit communication partners and purposes. This accommodation, as an overarching pragmatic strategy, manifests itself variously on each occasion. Among specific accommodative strategies, well documented is the use of pre-emptive strategies, whereby participants anticipate the risk of mis- or non-understanding and avoid it by clarifying, reformulating, or ‘translating’ what they have to say as appropriate for interactants or potential audiences and interactional or transactional purposes (Cogo & Pitzl, 2016; Kaur, 2009; cf. Sato et al., 2019). Likewise, accommodative conversational strategies include repeating, supportive turn-taking, simultaneous speech, and utterance completion by another speaker (Jenkins et al., 2011). All these specific strategies are variable in use and not neatly categorisable, and more to the point, they involve multilingual resources to a varying extent.

In the example below (Extract 1), Japanese and Taiwanese students at an English-medium college in Tokyo are texting via the mobile application LINE. They slip out of English and engage in multilingual practices.

Extract 1

Meeting up on a street (Ishikawa, 2021a, p. 51)

[Translation in brackets]

- 01 Student A: セブンの隣ね [so it's next to the 7(-Eleven)]
- 02 Student B: 我在インフォ
- 03 的前面 [I'm in front of the info(rmation board)]

The Japanese language combines three scripts: kanji or ‘Chinese’ characters (e.g., “隣”), hiragana (literally ‘ordinary’) phonograms (e.g., “の” “ね”), and katakana (literally ‘fragmentary’ but in effect ‘foreign’) phonograms. Both “セブン” [7] and “インフォ” [info] (Lines 01, 02) are written in katakana. Line 01 makes sense as Japanese while Lines 02 and 03 are basically Chinese. Even so, as it happens, Student A (Line 01) is Taiwanese, and Student B (Lines 02–03) is Japanese. They are accommodating to each other, and specifically, clarifying where they are by using linguistic resources associated with each other’s L1. It can be argued that Student B switches languages when he throws “インフォ” [info] (Line 02) into his Chinese sentence. However, it might not matter for him to what language this word belongs. Beyond linguistic boundaries, both participants create meaning and affect in this particular context.

In the next example (Extract 2), University lecturers 1 (Japanese) and 2 (Italian) are chatting about their Japanese colleague who has just “passed messages” (Line 03 below), or finished marking papers and passed them to Lecturer 1, and left already.

Extract 2

“Don’t step on the stones” (Cogo & Dewey, 2012, p. 131)

- 01 Lecturer 1: so she’s so relieved
- 02 Lecturer 2: oh [all right that’s goo::d
- 03 Lecturer 1: [that she passed messages
- 04 Lecturer 2: mhm=
- 05 Lecturer 1: =but I have to do that by Monday=
- 06 Lecturer 2: =mhm=
- 07 Lecturer 1: =it’s ok so she’s re- that’s why I said don’t step on the
stones ... cause so relaxed you- you might feel
- 08 Lecturer 2: ((chuckle))
- 09 Lecturer 2: oh all ri:ght [I see
- 10 Lecturer 1: [yeah
- 11 Lecturer 2: but is it just a Japanese:: eh:: way of saying?
- 12 Lecturer 1: yeah

Lecturer 1’s expression “don’t step on the stones” (Line 07) derives from the old saying in Japan 足元の石ころにつまずく (ashimoto no ishikoro ni tsumazuku), literally ‘to stumble on small stones at your feet’. She clarifies the background of her thought to the effect of pre-empting Lecturer 2’s potential mis- or non-understanding (Lines 01, 03). That is, their colleague has finished grading and become “so relieved” (Line 01) or too light-hearted. Towards the end of Line 07, Lecturer 1 reformulates her concern and explains that the colleague needs some caution in order not to make

some blunder. In Line 09, Lecturer 2 supportively takes a turn from Lecturer 1, leading to their simultaneous speech (Lines 09–10) and then to the sequence of clarification check and confirmation (Lines 11–12). At the level of orthographic transcription, which does not reflect phonetic and phonological variation, this conversation appears to take place solely in English. Nonetheless, as exemplified by “don’t step on the stones” (Line 07), for most English users, “the knowledge and experience that shapes their language” is always multilingual (Cogo, 2016, p. 63). To this effect, the extract captures “the influence of the user’s multilingual resources on their communication, which nonetheless remains in English [...] on the surface” (Cogo, 2018, p. 358).

Likewise, the writing process of English papers is variably multilingual. For example, a student at the American University of Beirut in Lebanon describes herself as follows.

I think in my trilingual head. Most of the time, I think in Arabic but my words fail me often and I have to recourse to English and French to save the thought. I find myself using English when I don’t know the pronunciation of the same word in French and vice versa. (Mullin et al., 2014, p. 158)

She clearly recourses to multilingual resources even if the written product looks completely English. At the same time, she is familiar with both a linear style of argument customarily taught in English-for-academic-purposes classes and an ‘elaborate’ style of argument with rhetorical flourishes in Arabic and French. Thus, in writing an academic paper through English with her “trilingual head”, she will give careful consideration “about the ‘elaborateness’ that Western English conventions undercut and about rhetorical moves that might instead be effectively meshed with the parsimonious” (p. 158).

As suggested by Jenkins (2015), EMF does not exclude ‘monolingual’ Anglophones so long as they can adapt to a multilingual environment by engaging in “the dynamic exploitation of previously unfamiliar linguistic resources” (Ishikawa, 2017, p. 38). For example, Baker and Ishikawa (2021) cite local students, including perceived monolinguals, at a university in the UK who have learnt to say “gambatting” in a community of students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. The stem of this word is from Japanese 頑張って! (gambatté) or 甘吧爹! (gānbadiē) in Taiwan, which means ‘hang on in there and keep working hard!’. The word ends with the English morpheme -ing, which makes the action progressive and more conspicuous (Ranta, 2006). Both local and international students find “gambatting” to be friendly and funny, all the more so because the

similar-sounding word ‘gambolling’ indicates quite the opposite.

In summary, EMF appreciates and foregrounds inherent multilingualism among English users. Each of their communicative cases involves varying degrees of multilingual resources and practices. None of the above examples is, therefore, generalisable. Indeed, ELF researchers have questioned the view of any linguistic usage as de-contextualised norms (e.g., Jenkins et al., 2011). Even so, EMF does not disregard the existence of ideological, monolingual norms. Instead, it focuses on the interplay of ‘ideological fixity’ and ‘interactional fluidity’. Ideologically, languages are discrete ‘things’ with their ‘universal’ forms pre-determined as ‘standard’, as if independently of context. In reality, however, language serves miscellaneous communicative purposes, frequently among multilinguals, for which “its contextual embodiment is crucial, and its isolation and compartmentalisation is problematic” (Baird et al., 2014, p. 181). The next sections turn to approach this complex reality of language and communication from both EMF and ‘trans-’ lenses. Again, EMF is an up-to-date notion in the field of ELF within applied linguistics, and translanguaging, transmodal and transcultural communication belong to ‘trans-’ theories, the theories du jour in applied linguistics.

3. EMF AND TRANSLANGUAGING

The ‘shrinking’ of territorial space on the globe provides us with more opportunities to come across different languages. In particular, urban settings see linguistic and cultural ‘superdiversity’ as an everyday reality (e.g., Blommaert, 2013). At the same time, digital technologies accelerate “supraterritorial relations” (Scholte, 2008, p. 1496) or relations without geographical constraints. While there is significant geographical and generational variation in access to online resources, internet users have already grown to 4.66 billion or 59.5% of the world population (Kemp, 2021). In this world of mobility, both online and offline, we are experiencing complex, web-like linguistic and cultural flows. Against this backdrop, EMF seeks to take a coherent, holistic view of language and communication, or more precisely, look beyond abstract linguistic constructs to actual communicative resources and practices which are featured by translanguaging. On the one hand, named languages, such as English and Japanese, exist as “macrosocial” (Harris, 1997) linguistic labels and boundaries. They are imagined to be independent systems, usually at the national level and in association with national cultures and speech communities. However, as ideological entities, no language can be fully described or delineated. On the other hand, EMF and translanguaging observe communicative phenomena, in accordance with what Risager

(2006) calls the natural loci of language. These loci correspond to communicative resources and individual processes in cognition and communicative practices among individuals in interaction. EMF and translanguaging do not focus on the ideological realm of language per se, but investigate how individuals bring in particular linguistic and other resources to create and interpret meaning. After all, whether a ‘mother tongue’ or an additional language, none of us acquires a whole language, however it may be defined. Instead, we learn to “know specific bits and pieces” (Blommaert, 2010, p. 23), accompanied by individual differences in familiar domains of use, literacy, and cultural associations.

Treating languages as historical, political entities, translanguaging questions the relevance of distinctions between them in the human mind (e.g., Li & Ho, 2018). It delves into “the deployment of a speaker’s full linguistic repertoire” (Otheguy et al., 2015, p. 283, emphasis removed). Methodologically, the complexity of the multilingual mind makes it difficult, or perhaps inappropriate, to establish what languages or language varieties are being used at a particular moment (e.g., Sahan & Rose, 2022). This point is illustrated by the following example from Singapore (Extract 3), in which Seetoh, who has just lost her husband, talks to an old friend Jamie.

Extract 3

Expressing gratitude (Li, 2018, pp. 13–14)

Seetoh: *Aiyoh* (discourse particle), we are all <ka ki nang> (自己人 – own people, meaning ‘friends’), **bian khe khi** (免客气 – don’t mention it). Ren lai jiu hao (人来就好 – good of you to come), why bring so many “barang barang” (‘things’). **Paiseh** (歹劳 – I’m embarrassed). ‘Nei chan hai yau sum’ (你真有心 – you are so considerate).

Notes:

Italics	Singlish
In square brackets < >	Teochew (Chinese)
Bold	Hokkien (Chinese)
Underlined	Mandarin (Chinese)
In double quotation marks	Malay
In single quotation marks	Cantonese (Chinese)
Standard font	English

As seen in the above extract, a linguist could certainly assign named languages or language varieties to different units of utterance. Seetoh herself would also know that words and phrases are ideologically assignable to languages or language varieties. However, it is highly

unlikely that she plans to switch them from moment to moment. Rather, she exploits linguistic resources in her repertoire that will make sense to Jamie. While the transcription does not contain facial expressions, gestures, and other physiological signals, the two interlocutors appear to constitute a ‘translanguaging space’ or “a space that is created by and for translanguaging practices and a space where boundaries between different socially constructed languages and between language and other semiotic resources are being pushed and broken” (Zhu et al., 2020, p. 66). With this type of interaction as evidence, translanguaging maintains that bounded categories of language are largely irrelevant to multilinguals who engage in communicative instances. Thus, translanguaging urges us not to delimit our approach to communication by drawing “the boundaries between named languages, language varieties, and language and other semiotic systems” (Li, 2018, p. 9). Instead, it encourages us to explore what multilinguals do in situ or in a way that corresponds to how they make use of their communicative repertoires.

Similarities between EMF and translanguaging are striking in that they both heed how interactants transcend, or rather transgress, linguistic boundaries. Both of them recognise that these boundaries are historically and politically crafted, nationally and monolingually orientated, and therefore ideological. Nonetheless, there are a number of modest differences between EMF and translanguaging in the scope of fluid linguistic resources and practices. First of all, taking the malleability and permeability of named languages as its starting point, EMF posits that multilingualism is immanent in all interactions at a global scale (Jenkins, 2015). For this reason, EMF potentially targets any communication among English users. It enquires into situational appropriation of multilingual resources however covert they may be. In contrast, translanguaging tends to target overt multilingual practices. In addition, multilingualism in EMF is the gross property of a communicative situation (Ishikawa, 2017). As in the aforementioned example of “gambatting” at the Anglophone international university (Section 2), multilingualism in EMF is potentially relevant to all English users, irrespective of their ability in other languages. As another example from Baker and Ishikawa (2021), a Japanese tourist in a shop in Helsinki, Finland happens to meet his Korean friend. Triggered by a multilingual atmosphere, especially a free KAHVI (coffee) sign, as well as feeling exhilarated by this chance meeting, the Japanese visitor suddenly recalls having enjoyed caffè corretto (or ‘Italian’ espresso with liquor) with an Italian family. Hearing him, then, reminds the Korean interlocutor of her own experience with ‘Spanish’ carajillo. Both participants ensemble their past and immediate multilingual experiences at a specific social moment. However, translanguaging on the part of perceived monolinguals is rare

in research, and so is the influence of multilingual circumstances (Baker & Ishikawa, 2021). It should be noted, though, that the aforementioned concept of ‘translanguaging space’ might be extrapolated to embrace any English users and include the surrounding visible and audible linguistic landscape. Finally, EMF presumes the availability of English among participants, but translanguaging can dispense with English. In this particular regard, EMF scenarios are narrower.

There is also a slight difference between EMF and translanguaging in the focus of fluid linguistic resources and practices.

EMF explores the interplay between the ideological being of multiple, enumerable languages and fluid, flexible linguistic resources and repertoires. This may be why the term ‘multi’ is retained in the appellation of EMF even though ELF researchers do recognize the dynamic communicative process foregrounded by the term translanguaging. (Ishikawa, 2021b, p. 23)

While translanguaging directs its attention to ‘natural’ or cognitive and interactional loci of language and communication, EMF spotlights the tension of these loci against the ideological locus of language. Globalisation does not diminish the relevance of named language categories but accentuates their existence as ideological constructs. This is particularly true of English as it pertains to monolingually orientated Standard English in English language teaching (ELT). In applied linguistics, many second language acquisition (SLA) studies have viewed additional language learning as if it were a universal process of becoming another monolingual person “rather than different people from monolinguals in L1” (Cook, 2013, pp. 37–38). On the back of SLA research, the ELT industry may be regarded as abstracting and materialising a national ‘standard’ variety in a couple of Anglophone countries, and commodifying it globally as Standard English (e.g., Leung et al., 2016). In reality, however, our communication goes across the national scale, and our individually various multilingual developments and backgrounds could never be held in abeyance as with the examples cited thus far (Sections 2–3). English users in a multilingual world face the opposing forces of monolingually orientated, ideological fixity and multilingual, interactional fluidity. The constructed ideology of national languages, especially ‘standard’ varieties, as systematic ‘objects’ remains powerful whenever we learn language and communicate. Even so, individuals develop and exploit linguistic resources in a situated social context. To borrow Pennycook’s (2007) words: “Caught between fluidity and fixity, then, cultural and linguistic forms are always in a state of flux, always changing, always part of a process of the refashioning of identity”

(p. 8).

As research fields, both ELF and translanguaging reside in the discipline of applied linguistics, which is by definition transdisciplinary. It investigates not just language but also language-related problems in the world. Translanguaging positions itself as “a transdisciplinary lens” (García & Li, 2014, p. 42), and its researchers recognise that the ELF field also engages in social issues around the role of language and education (e.g., Li, 2016). In the past, ELF research has challenged the epistemological and institutional structures that place Anglophones as a core part of applied linguistics, especially ELT (e.g., Jenkins, 2000). Along this line, pedagogic implications (e.g., Bayyurt & Akcan, 2015) and power relationships (e.g., Baker, 2015) have been part of ELF enquiry. However, compared with EMF, translanguaging engages in wider social concerns, beyond English. It also has a more explicit objective to critique and transform social inequity. García and Li (2014) expect that “orders of discourses shift and the voices of Others come to the forefront, relating then translanguaging to criticality, critical pedagogy, social justice and the linguistic human rights agenda” (p. 3).

Indeed, critical social engagement has always been a substantial part of translanguaging. The roots of translanguaging lie in bilingual education research with the aim of revitalising a minority language (Williams, 1994) and reengaging children from minority languages (e.g., García, 2009). Subsequent translanguaging studies also advocate transforming language-based inequalities in society more broadly (e.g., Creese & Blackledge, 2015). Meanwhile, translanguaging builds on and expands the notion of languaging, which emphasises our innate ability to use language dynamically to make sense of, and interact with, the world (Doughty, 1972). Translanguaging adds another dimension to languaging, that is, challenging existing political and ethical issues. Unlike the roots of translanguaging, ELF research started with the observation in ELT that international students tended not to use the local linguistic rules they learnt when they communicated among themselves (Jenkins, 1996). Nonetheless, more multilingual and critical (re)orientation has increasingly come to the fore in accordance with the notion of EMF and in areas, such as indigenous lingua francas (e.g., van der Walt & Evans, 2018), migration (e.g., Guido, 2016), international universities and language entry testing (e.g., Jenkins, 2014; Jenkins & Leung, 2019), and anonymous communication on social media (e.g., Jenks, 2012).

4. EMF AND TRANSMODAL, TRANSCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

In line with translanguaging, the ELF field has begun to counter “the

‘lingua bias’ of communication” (Li, 2018, p. 15) or the bias towards language as the only meaning-making resources researched. Even though language is a major form of human communication, its use is entangled in a wider set of symbols and signs. We express and interpret them through multiple communicative systems, called multimodality, defined as “a socially shaped and culturally given resource for meaning making” (Kress, 2014, p. 60). Examples include colour, emoji, image, animation, layout, music, gesture, and speech. Coupled with the global reach of English, the expansion of online technologies makes the multimodal nature of human communication more prominent and ubiquitous. Digital information and interaction take advantage of those different modes, with the content and context mobile and hyperlinked through digital networks (e.g., Sangiamchit, 2018). EMF is aligned with both multimodality and transmodality, or transmodal communication more commonly. That is, multimodal resources result in transmodal processes, whereby meaning emerges not as the sum of each mode, but as one synergetic whole through the collaboration of multiple modes (Newfield, 2014). To put it another way, “a range of modes are used simultaneously, with boundaries between modes blurring, and useful distinctions among modes not easily made” (Baker & Ishikawa, 2021, p. 175).

The example below (Extract 4) comes from Facebook wall updates of young Mongolians, Naidan and Dolgormaa. Only Dolgormaa can afford regular transnational movement, both online and offline. The “Absolute Hunk” in her post (Line 02 below) indexes a global brand of vodka advertised by a sexy-looking actor from the United States (US).

Extract 4

Updating status on Facebook (Dovchin et al., 2016, p. 99)

[Translation in brackets]

01 Naidan: Намрын налгар өдрүүдээ гэж...kkk – 😊 feeling wonderful.

[Nice autumn day...kkk – 😊 feeling wonderful.]

02 Dolgormaa: UB-d weather tiim muu bgamuu, flight hoishlogdloo, just wandering around, but saw an Absolute Hunk! Girls! *Wink wink*
[Is the weather that bad in Ulaanbaatar (UB)? My flight has been delayed, just wandering around, but saw an Absolute Hunk! Girls! *Wink wink*]

Linguistically, Naidan uses Mongolian in the Cyrillic alphabet, combined with the simple English phrase pre-provided by Facebook (Line 01).

Dolgormaa mingles Mongolian and English in the Latin alphabet (Line 02). At the same time, both their updates are multimodal since meaning depends not only on the scripts, but also on a giggling sound “kkk”, a smiling emoji 😊 (Line 01), and a facial expression “*Wink wink*” (Line 02). Using multimodal resources, they manage transmodal processes; in other words, create meaning and emotional impact through the interaction of modes. Naidan seems excited not so much because of any one of the elements he provides; i.e., the nice weather, giggling sound, and smiling, but because all these elements work together (Line 01). Likewise, Dolgormaa seems pleased while her text is moving through the linguistic boundaries ‘as she pleases’ and when her exclamation is embedded in winking expressions (Line 02).

Compared with EMF, translanguaging tends to feature transmodality more explicitly than multimodality. Translanguaging calls attention to how multiple modes are meshed for communicative purposes. This point is demonstrated by the following sign (Figure 1).

Figure 1

A translanguaging sign from Li (2016, p. 6)



Placed next to the text “I”, the red-heart symbol is ideationally linked to the verb love and contains the ‘grammatical’ object represented by the flag of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), the Five-starred Red Flag. The large star represents the Chinese Communist Party leading and uniting different social classes (the other four stars). The whole sign produces the message ‘I love China’, or more precisely, ‘I love PRC’, and vividly expresses affection to the country, and perhaps also to its government. As exemplified by this translanguaging sign, translanguaging premises that the complexity of multimodal affordances renders it inadequate to analyse each symbol independently. Again, translanguaging doubts the discreteness between language and other meaning-making systems or modes, with a view to embracing our full communicative repertoires.

Like communicative modes, culture is also an inevitable part of considering EMF and translanguaging. Without culture, our symbols and signs, including words and phrases, would have no meaning. The symbol

♥, for example, has no intrinsic meaning in its shape or colour. It is human interaction that has developed and attached cultural value to them. In addition, it is through human interaction that culture ‘travels’ across local, provincial, national, regional, and global scales (Clifford, 1992). The aforementioned ‘I love China’ sign may be seen as part of the global flow of cultural products. Anyone who has visited New York State, US, would remember the logo of the text “I” and the red-heart symbol over the letters N and Y to mean ‘I love New York’. Similar logos now exist in various places around the world, involving various languages. The monumental placement of “I”, “♥”, “N”, and “Y”, in turn, might be reminiscent of the large, red, historical sculpture by US pop artist Robert Indiana, which places the letters L and O over the letters V and E. The sculpture appears as if LOVE sprang up from the ground. In brief, cultural flows connect different times and places in an unexpected manner.

Traditional cross-cultural research assumes cultural differences and communicative difficulties at the national level as if people were representations of national cultures. ELF and intercultural communication researchers problematise such an essentialised understanding of culture and its role in interactional practices (e.g., Baker, 2015; Scollon et al., 2012). With qualitative data, ELF studies have revealed culture as co-constructed and contested during interaction amid its continuous global flows (e.g., Zhu, 2015). Precisely, EMF is aligned with both intercultural and transcultural communication, and it would be fair to say that translanguaging is aligned more with the transcultural. Intercultural communication refers to actual instances where cultural differences are perceived as relevant to the interaction by participants or researchers (Baker, 2015; Zhu, 2019). Whether at the national or any other level, individuals may initially draw on cultural stereotypes or generalisations. However, they need to move beyond these simplified ideas to recognise that cultural categories, similarities, and differences are not given but negotiable. Otherwise, cultural differences would hinder, rather than help and enrich, intercultural communication (e.g., Piller, 2017). Below is a well-cited example from Baker (2009) (Extract 5) to illustrate these points. Nami (Thai) has a casual conversation with Philippe (Belgium) in an urban café in her city of Bangkok, Thailand. She calls her university “school” in this conversation.

Extract 5

“maybe they think it’s cool” (Baker, 2009, pp. 581–582)

- 01 Philippe: no Marseilles is really nice really nice city south of
 France close you have Nice Cannes it’s really cool the
 food is amazing and they drink err Ricard
- 02 Nami: Ricard

03 Philippe: they play err petanque
 04 Nami: err
 05 Philippe: petanque
 06 Nami: petanque ahh petanque
 07 Philippe: yeah (?)
 08 Nami: there's some there's some people from my school that
 09 Philippe: you know that the French embassy they organise err a
 championship every year in Thailand
 10 Nami: yeah
 11 Philippe: I've been there a few times
 12 Nami: do you play
 13 Philippe: ah
 14 Nami: do you play
 15 Philippe: no ... I'm shit
 16 Nami: ((laughs)) you're really young ((laughs))
 17 Philippe: I know you have to be really old to play that game
 18 Nami: NO ((laughs))
 19 Philippe: maybe I'm not old enough
 20 Nami: no at school a lot of young students play petanque
 21 Philippe: maybe they think it's cool [...] uhu

Philippe offers a rather stereotyped image of tourist destinations, food, drink (Line 01), and the game of petanque (Lines 03, 05). Here, he describes petanque as belonging to conventional French cultures, and south French, more specifically. For Nami, however, petanque also belongs to Bangkok and youth cultures (Line 08). Phillipe reintroduces petanque as part of the global flow of 'French' cultural practices (Line 09), but still disassociates it from younger generations. This results in a temporary misunderstanding between the two interlocutors (Lines 14–20). While Nami wonders why a young person should be “shit” (Line 15) at the popular game among her fellow collegians, Philippe takes his young age as an excuse for not being familiar with this classical game (Lines 17, 19). Nami refutes this excuse and repeats that the young also play it (Lines 18, 20), and notably, Philippe transforms his orientation accordingly (Line 21). In short, the participants co-construct a dynamic interpretation of petanque and reach a nuanced understanding of it within a short space of time. In relation to language, while their conversation appears to be in English on the surface, we could imagine that multiple named languages, English, French, and Thai, permeate each other in phonology and beyond. Petanque could, in fact, be written in pétanque or เปตอง. In relation to communicative mode, we could imagine that laughter, facial expression, gesture, and posture are embedded in a lively atmosphere.

It is true that intercultural communication is a useful term to acknowledge the intersubjective nature of cultural differences. However, it is often unclear what specific cultures participants are in-between in intercultural communication (e.g., Baker & Ishikawa, 2021). Going back to an earlier example from multilingual Helsinki, Finland, drinking coffee is a global cultural practice with different variations which can be interpreted variously and dynamically in intercultural communication (Section 3). Similarly, in Extract 4, small-talking about the weather, alluding to an internationally recognised celebrity, and winking are all cultural practices, but none of them could reasonably be delineated as representing any a priori cultural categories. For another example, Philippe and Nami in Extract 5 see the cultural practice of petanque simultaneously at local (i.e., a university in Bangkok), provincial (southern France), national (France), and global scales (the French embassy in Bangkok). Given the complexity and fluidity of culture, recent ELF studies take transcultural communication as a research approach, which eschews describing how participants mix elements of presupposed cultures and instead takes “nebulous and overlapping nature of culture” (Ishikawa, 2018, p. 455) as the starting point of investigation. This notion originates from social research of transculturality (e.g., Appadurai, 1996; Welsch, 1999), which targets how people defy and modify established cultural practices for their own lives. With a focus on interaction, and in resonance with translanguaging, transcultural communication questions the relevance of the boundaries of named cultures for individuals. Similar to named languages in EMF, transcultural communication no longer takes the ideological significance of national cultures for granted, and where seen as salient, it is critically interrogated. In Baker and Sangiamchit’s (2019) words,

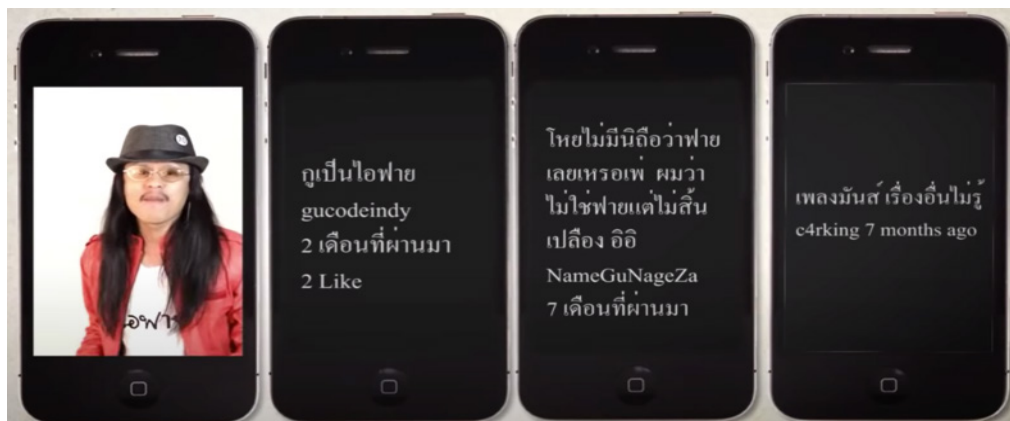
[t]ranscultural communication, in keeping with trans- perspectives, is characterised here as communication where interactants move through and across, rather than in-between, cultural and linguistic boundaries, thus, ‘named’ languages and cultures can no longer be taken for granted and in the process borders become blurred, transgressed and transcended. (p. 472)

The final example below (Extract 6), taken from Facebook exchanges, shows the intricacies of EMF and transmodal, transcultural communication (for further details, see Baker & Ishikawa, 2021, pp. 220–222; Baker & Sangiamchit, 2019, pp. 478–480). Ken (Thai) posts a YouTube song that makes fun of the craze over a new iPhone in Thailand. His friend Symeon (Greek) is the first to respond, asking for explanation of

this song. The extract excludes automatically generated information (e.g., date, time) and the ‘Like’ function on Facebook and thus adapts the original extracts in Sangiamchit (2017) and Baker and Sangiamchit (2019).

Extract 6

คาวบอย – ไอโฟน (*Cowboy – iPhone*) (Adapted from Baker & Sangiamchit, 2019, pp. 478–479; Sangiamchit, 2017, pp. 166–167)



คาวบอย – ไอโฟน [Official Music Video]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6Mmp8K86TQ>

- 01 Symeon: I’m not so sure for the purpose of this video ... but it makes me laugh ... What does he say?
- 02 Toh: give me one pls.
- 03 Ken: Symeon This guy names himself ‘cowboy’. He is trying to mimic one of the most famous Thai band named ‘Carabao’. The word ‘Carabao’ means ‘water buffalo’ in Tagalog language widely used in Philippine. Moreover, ‘buffalo’ is closely pronounced like ‘fine’ so ‘I’m fine’ has the close meaning to ‘You are a buffalo’ in Thai. That’s the reason why you can see a lot of buffaloes in the music video.
- 04 Ken: Are you fine?
- 05 Symeon: I’m flying on Wednesday and perhaps I’ll come to the Uni ... So, I’ll see you then
- 06 Ken: ‘you are fine’ means ‘you are a buffalo’
- 07 Symeon: haha ... and what’s the relation to the iphone?
- 08 Ken: The name of this music is iPhone. The similarity of the pronunciation is played ‘I-Phone’ -> ‘I-Fine’. The meaning of this music is pretty ironic. It’s saying that ‘Everyone has iPhone. if I don’t have iPhone I will look like I-Fine (buffalo)’. ha ha
- 09 Symeon: Anyway ... it seems hilarious

The above extract is about the guy named Cowboy, who mimics the well-known Thai rock band Carabao (คาราบาว) and likens the general public to Asian water buffalos jokingly (Line 03). In regard to EMF, multilingual influences and practices manifest themselves in this example. In the first place, participants' text exchange would not make sense without Cowboy's song, in which we see and hear a lot of Thai. The subsequent text is also more multilingual than it may first appear to be, owing to the use of puns. The word Carabao refers to 'water buffalo' in Tagalog (Line 03), creating a pun between the name of the rock band and the images of buffaloes in the video. "I-Fine" is another pun not only on the iPhone ("I-Fine"), but also on 'I am a buffalo' ("I-Fine"), with 'Fine' having a similar pronunciation to 'buffalo' in the Thai youth slang (Lines 03, 08). With an iPhone, especially its newest model, individuals may feel like they are fine ('I-Fine') or good enough. Without it, they may feel that they are like buffalos ('I-Fine'). At the same time, it may be argued that those who subserviently make a 'mad rush' for a new iPhone's release are also like buffaloes ('I-Fine'). In regard to transmodal, transcultural communication, the images of buffaloes, the singer Cowboy 'cosplaying' Carabao, his rhythmical tune, and the text conversation accompanied with Symeon's repeated use of "... " (Lines 01, 05, 07, 09) and Ken's "'I-Phone' -> 'I-Fine'" (Line 08), all combine themselves to produce the humorous, ironical, and satirical view of iPhone users. While the iPhone, originally from the US, is a global cultural symbol of power, progress, and prosperity, the Asian water buffalo is a regional cultural symbol of being dull and obedient, and in this extract, linked to local youth culture via slang. In Thailand and elsewhere, Carabao is often seen as a social protest in popular culture, and in resonance with Carabao, Cowboy appears to be critical of the business capitalising on the working class and cynical about those being capitalised on. According to Baker and Sangiamchit (2019):

Significantly, this example illustrates not passive acceptance of all these linguistic categories, cultural references and associations, but rather the participants being consciously transgressive in this playful critique of the iPhone and its socio-cultural meanings, as well as, playing with and transcending cultural and linguistic boundaries. (p. 480)

5. CONCLUSION

The notion of EMF is closely aligned with 'trans-' theories in applied linguistics, specifically translanguaging and transmodal, transcultural communication. These 'trans-' theories assist in clarifying what EMF is

about. The main points of this paper can be summarized as below (Table 1).

Table 1
EMF and ‘trans-’ theories

EMF	‘trans-’ theories
EMF features the tension between the ideological fixity of named languages and the pragmatic fluidity of communicative resources and practices.	Translanguaging features how multilinguals make use of their full communicative repertoires, irrespective of the distinction between politically named languages.
EMF regards multilingual influences and practices as the inherent, gross property of global interaction scenarios.	Translanguaging regards multilinguals’ creative communicative practice as a way of pursuing social equity.
EMF observes how multimodal resources result in the transmodal processes of achieving synergetic meaning.	Transmodal communication observes how communicative modes, including language, are meshed as if they are inseparable.
EMF frames cultural understanding as intersubjectively constructed, thus not presupposing any cultural characterisation of interactants or interactions.	Transcultural communication frames cultural categories, similarities, and differences as amorphous and constantly emergent during interaction.

With modest differences in focus and scope, both EMF and ‘trans-’ theories integrate language and communication, and highlight the limited role of any named language, including participants’ L1s, as well as any named culture or mode in global encounters. With the help of ‘trans-’ theories, EMF positions English as embedded in wider multilingual, multimodal, and multicultural resources which are effectuated through the translingual, transmodal, and transcultural processes of meaning co-construction. What drives these processes seems to be mutual accommodation, commonly described as linguistic accommodation (Section 2). Future research in the ELF field, however, should take more notice of modal and cultural aspects of accommodation as well.

With the help of EMF, the nature of linguistic, modal, and cultural boundaries in ‘trans-’ theories becomes clearer. ‘Trans-’ theories negate traditional boundaries and yet predicate theoretical validity on the existence of the boundaries themselves. Put simply, we cannot transgress boundaries unless they exist. EMF does not dismiss the systematic view of language, mode, and culture, but views their boundaries as ideological entities and thus “never clear-cut or independent, but dynamically adaptive and thus

endlessly changing” (Ishikawa, 2020a, p. 100).

In the future, the ELF field, or rather the EMF field, may subvert the epistemological and institutional structures that place the English language as a core part of applied linguistics, especially ELT. So long as English is deemed as a global language, it resides in a multilingual world, and its efficacy seems to depend on translingual, transmodal, and transcultural practices according to the situation, not on a fixed construct of one particular language. ‘EMF awareness’ as a pedagogic intervention for “the integration of linguistic and cultural understanding, empowered attitudes, and emancipated communicative practices” (Ishikawa, 2020b, p. 416) is among the first few studies to connect the language and global communication by way of EMF and ‘trans-’ theories. It is hoped that a growing body of future EMF research will make further steps towards resolving our major real-world problem: how English users communicate with each other effectively in a multilingual world.

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APPENDIX

Transcription conventions for Extracts 2, 3, and 5

[	overlapping speech
:	lengthened sound
=	latched utterance
...	pause (untimed)
(())	non-linguistic features of the transcription
()	annotation
(?)	inaudible
[...]	a section of dialogue not transcribed