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## **English as a lingua franca used at international meetings**

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### **Abstract**

The paper deals with the use of English as a lingua franca. It concentrates on the environment of international meetings where English is used as a lingua franca. The aim of the research conducted through a survey of members of a NATO working group is to find out how native and non-native speakers feel about English used as a lingua franca during international meetings and how these two groups of speakers see each other in multinational interaction from the point of view of linguistics. The sections dealing with non-native speakers concentrate on the level of knowledge of English and on how native speakers cope with the English used during the meetings. The sections dealing with the views of English native speakers should establish the approach they take towards mistakes made by non-native speakers, whether native speakers should adjust the way they speak at international meetings and how they generally view the fact that their mother tongue is used all around the world.

### **Keywords**

English, communication, foreign language, international meeting, global language, lingua franca

### **Introduction**

English has a unique position in the world today. It has become a global language, a new lingua franca. It is a new communication tool for a lot of people all around the world which is so well connected today thanks to new technologies such as the Internet and air travel, as was never the case in the past. International communication has become a daily routine for hundreds of thousands if not millions of people. This paper focuses on one particular area of international communication: international business meetings – meetings of a NATO working group, to be more precise. It deals with English used as a lingua franca at these meetings, it attempts to discover how native and non-native members of the group feel about the English used during the meetings that they

attend and how these two groups of speakers see each other in multinational interaction from the point of view of linguistics.

It should be noted here that international communication can be described from a lot of different angles as it has many aspects, but this paper is primarily oriented towards linguistics and does not cover other factors of international communication such as the cultural and social identities of participants, their social or cultural background, gender issues, positions of delegates in the structure of the group or power relations within it. As these factors are inseparable from those of linguistics, it is not possible to avoid mention of them completely, but the main focus of the paper pertains to the linguistics of English as a lingua franca (henceforth ELF).

### **1. English as a lingua franca**

No other language has occupied the position English holds today. The number of English speakers is extremely high, as can be seen from the following figures differentiating types of speakers as given by Graddol (2000, p. 10): first-language speakers or native speakers, i.e. those speakers for whom English is the mother tongue (Great Britain, Ireland, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand) - 375 million; second-language speakers, i.e. those speakers who use English as an additional language besides their mother tongue, usually because it has a special position or special status, such as being an official language of the country (as in Nigeria, India or South Africa) - 375 million; speakers who learn English as a foreign language (as in the Czech Republic, Poland, Russia or China) - 750 million.

These figures are only estimates and it is very probable that since 2000, when the book was written, the numbers have risen, but they show that English is used by more people than any other language and they offer quite a useful overview of the “power” of English. Also, the statistics suggest that about a quarter of the world’s population is either fluent or competent in English, and the number keeps growing; in the early 2000s it was about 1.5 billion people (Crystal, 2003, p. 6). This also means that English is used for international communication among millions of people of various nationalities every day, and making it a lingua franca. However, English as a lingua franca is not the same as lingua francas used in the past.

Generally speaking, a lingua franca is “a language adopted as a common language between speakers whose native languages are different” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2015, n.pag.). It is a language that people choose when their mother tongues are different but they need to speak to each other for various reasons, for example for business, administrative or diplomatic purposes. Therefore, in the

most general sense, a lingua franca is not a mother tongue. Crystal (2003) calls it a “common language”. It was originally a simplified language (a pidgin) and it was created as a combination of the different mother tongues of people who used it or it was a language accepted from outside the community (for example French) for political, economic, religious or other reasons (p. 11). Thus, a lingua franca had no native speakers. As Jenkins (2005) explains: “[...], 'lingua franca' has come to mean a language variety used between people who speak different first languages and for none of whom it is the mother tongue. In other words, according to this interpretation, a lingua franca has no native speakers” (n.pag.).

Obviously, English has native speakers; it has already been mentioned that their number is approximately 375 million. It is not possible to completely exclude them from interaction and communication. Therefore, it is necessary to create a different, more accurate definition of ELF. Jenkins, Cogo and Dewey (2011) cite a definition from the VOICE (Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English) website, which defines ELF as “an additionally acquired language system which serves as a common means of communication for speakers of different first languages” (p. 283). Seidlhofer’s (2011) definition says that ELF is “any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option” (p. 7).

In this respect, of course, the position of speakers using ELF is different from that of speakers of a lingua franca understood in the traditional sense: they have a model they can follow; they have the “ideal” they can attempt to emulate as far as possible. The question is whether they indeed do this or whether they should do it, which will be discussed in the following section.

Still we are presented with a situation for which no comparisons exist. There is a language with quite a high number of native speakers. At the same time there are non-native speakers of this language whose number is much higher than the number of native speakers (see above). The ratio of native to non-native speakers is probably 1:3 (Crystal, 2003, p. 69). Another way to describe this situation is to quote the German author Beneke, who estimates that “80 per cent of all communication involving the use of English as a second or foreign language does not involve any native speakers of English” (as cited in Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 2). What does this mean for the language?

It means that there is an unprecedented linguistic situation because for the first time in history, a language has reached global dimensions and at the same time its native speakers are a minority, which implies that they are less likely to set the linguistic reference norm (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 7). If there is a majority of non-native speakers in the world, inevitably they will be the ones who start

adjusting the language according to their needs and communication purposes, and this is what makes English a real lingua franca because the language “has taken on a life of its own, in principle independent to a considerable degree of the norms established by its native users” (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 8).

## **2. English as a lingua franca versus English as a foreign language**

ELF, as any other lingua franca, is mostly used among speakers for whom English is either a second or a foreign language. It is mentioned in the previous section that 80 per cent of these conversations quite probably do not involve any native speakers. Yet native English is still the “target” or “goal” for these non-native speakers and their effort is supported by their teachers. It is, however, questionable whether such an approach is reasonable and whether it makes sense.

When speakers learn a foreign language (in this case, English as a foreign language, henceforth EFL), their “focus is very much on where the language comes from, who its native speakers are, and what cultural associations are bound up with it” (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 17). For them, English as a native language (henceforth ENL) is the model to which they try to get as close as they can, mainly because they want to communicate with native speakers of that language or they are interested in the history, literature, films or music of the countries where English is spoken as a native language, and also they might learn the language because they want to work, study or live in one of those countries. In such a case, “[...] it is to be expected that non-native speakers (learners and teachers) will defer to NS [native speakers’] norms of using the language – not only in terms of what is grammatically correct but also of what is situationally appropriate and typical, with all the fine nuances, resonances, and allusions embedded in shared knowledge and experience acting as ‘memberships’ devices” (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 17).

Speakers who use ELF certainly have different goals. They use English to achieve communication goals when speaking to both native and non-native speakers at business meetings, during conferences, while travelling and so on. When speaking to non-native speakers, it happens quite often that their knowledge of English differs, so they have to “adjust” what they say and mainly how they say it to current partners in conversation. In this respect, they have to be very flexible. As Seidlhofer (2011) notes, ELF is thus “adapted to the needs of intercultural communication” (p. 17). Nor is it necessary for non-native speakers to try to speak English as perfectly as possible in an ELF environment. That is why Seidlhofer (2011) argues that “it would be interactionally counter-

productive, even patently absurd in most cases, for speakers to (strive to) adhere to ENL linguacultural norms when no ENL speakers may even be present” (p. 18).

How much native speakers mind when non-native speakers deviate from linguistic norms of ENL will be discussed in Section 6.1, but certainly a new approach towards English spoken in an international environment should be taken into account. The main goal of ELF is communication, which can definitely be achieved without absolute adherence to all ENL rules.

### **3. English used at international meetings**

International organisations are one of many areas where there is a big need for a common language and one of many areas where English is used as a lingua franca besides areas such as international trade, science, information technology, tourism, and the film and music or aviation industry.

The League of Nations was founded shortly after the First World War, and as Crystal (2003) stresses it was the first international organisation where English was one of the official languages. When it was replaced by the United Nations in 1945, English kept its position. Crystal estimates that English is used as an official language in more than 85% of international organisations in the world (p. 87).

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (henceforth NATO) does not deviate from this. It was founded in 1949 and from the very beginning English has been – together with French – its official language. The Final Communiqué of the first Session of the North Atlantic Council states that “English and French shall be the official languages for the entire North Atlantic Treaty Organization” (para. ‘Languages’).

This paper presents information gathered from delegates of a NATO working group. Such a group provides a very valuable sample of an international environment where English is used as a lingua franca because meetings are usually held in English and interpretation into French is provided only when meetings take place in the headquarters in Brussels. The reasons are mostly pragmatic: while interpreters are available at the headquarters, it would be more difficult to provide everything necessary for interpreting when a meeting was taking place outside the headquarters. Interpreting requires special equipment (earphones etc.), an extra room for interpreters and it also raises the cost of hiring an interpreter. Quite often a meeting takes place in military barracks of the host country, where interpreting facilities are not available. Also, a civilian interpreter might struggle with specialized vocabulary used at the meetings. Moreover, all delegates are supposed to speak English (even the French ones), as

all non-simultaneous interpreting would be disruptive and double the time necessary for such a meeting.

ELF is of course mainly a spoken language. However, before spoken English is dealt with, written English should be covered as well. Seidlhofer (2004) states that written documents “have, so far at least, conformed to the norms of standard grammar” (p. 223). Writing gives non-native speakers an opportunity to check with dictionaries, it gives them time to re-write their texts, have them corrected or even proof-read, which makes it practicable and easier to follow native speakers’ norms.

Written documents of the NATO working group, with the exception of standardisation documents, which are produced both in English and French, are also produced only in English. Here, the rule that ENL should not be the ultimate goal for ELF speakers, which applies for spoken language, is not valid. Native English is considered the model to which written documents (the minutes of meeting, for instance) should approximate, and for this reason it is seen as an advantage if a native speaker becomes a secretary of the group (i.e. the person who writes the minutes and coordinates the administrative steps taken by the group) because then she or he is able to produce well-written and, from a native speakers’ point of view, correct documents. It is not, however, possible to put this burden on native speakers only because they are native speakers. In a situation where the secretary is a non-native speaker, native speakers might be asked to proof-read the document before it is distributed.

This paper and its survey, however, concentrate on spoken language. ELF used at international meeting can be described concisely using the features of BELF (Business ELF).

As Jenkins et al. (2011) state, “BELF communication is seen as content-oriented (rather than focusing on form)” and “expertise and correctness in terms of NS [native speakers’] standards, such as native-like grammar or pronunciation, are secondary to accommodation practices” (p. 298). In other words, the most important thing during the meetings is to get the message across no matter whether delegates speak correctly from the point of view of grammar or pronunciation.

The fact that English is used as a communication tool at these meetings gives native speakers a certain advantage because they do not have to learn a foreign language to be able to attend such events. At the same time, native speakers “may be considered to be at a disadvantage or even to be a problem [...] because they are more difficult to understand than speakers of other varieties of English” (Jenkins et al., 2011, p. 298). Obviously, native speakers of English are at an

advantage because it is their mother tongue that is spoken at the meetings but they are not always good at adjusting their English to the manner and level of English that is used there. Jenkins et al. mention that “while they seem to be aware of the challenges of intercultural communication, they seem unable to adopt effective accommodation strategies, [...] [however, they] at least in their self-reports, are aware of the need for such kinds of skills, and claim that they do take steps to accommodate to their NNS [non-native speakers’] counterparts by, for instance, avoiding idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms” (p. 298 - 299). These issues will be dealt with below.

#### **4. Methodology**

The respondents of the survey were delegates of a NATO working group, both soldiers and civilian employees who represent their countries in the group. The group has about thirty members from about twenty-five countries; eighteen members filled in the questionnaires. All of the respondents are either experts who are involved in research and development or professionals involved in logistic processes and acquisition of materiel<sup>19</sup>.

The information for the survey was collected through a questionnaire. Two questionnaires were prepared, one for native speakers and the other for non-native speakers (see Appendices 1 and 2). The questionnaires were in Word format and sent via e-mail. The e-mail was a personal request to delegates who were believed to be willing to contribute, many of whom had been with the group for some time, and also to some ex-members of the group who had been with the group long enough to be able to make a valid contribution. Meetings of the group take place only twice a year and the schedule of the meetings is usually very tight; therefore it was not possible to talk about the questionnaires with the respondents in person.

As a result, six filled-in questionnaires from native speakers and twelve from non-native speakers were received. There were two responses from Great Britain, two from the United States and two from Canada. No Australians were asked to fill in the questionnaire, although there are Australian members of the group. The reason for the exclusion of Australians is that they attend the meetings only rarely and usually there is no stable representation for Australia; typically one member attends one meeting and another comes for the next, which means neither of them would be able to give valuable feedback on their longer-term work in the group. That is also why non-native speakers in the group do not

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<sup>19</sup> One of the authors of the paper has been a member of the group for more than ten years.

have enough experience of talking to Australian delegates or listening to them around the table. Australia is of course not a NATO member country but it is one of the countries with which NATO cooperates very closely, and that is why the group has Australian members.

Concerning non-native speakers, one reply was received from each of these countries – Belgium, Greece, Spain, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Austria, Hungary, Norway, and Slovakia. Two replies were from Germany.

The questionnaires contained about twenty questions. The questions for non-native speakers focused on the level of knowledge of English (given both by certificates and real knowledge) and at how native speakers cope with the English used during the meetings: whether they have problems with understanding, get lost in a discussion or decide not to join it for linguistic reasons. The questions for native speakers were to establish what approach native speakers take towards mistakes made by non-native speakers, whether they feel that they should adjust the way they speak at international meetings and how they generally view the fact that their mother tongue is used all around the world.

## **5. Non-Native Speakers**

The questionnaire for non-native speakers starts with some general questions before it proceeds to questions related to international meetings.

### **5.1 General questions**

#### **5.1.1 Mother tongue and foreign languages**

First of all, respondents were asked to name their mother tongue. This question had no purpose other than to make sure all the delegates could be considered non-native speakers of English.

In the following question, the respondents were asked whether they spoke any other foreign language besides English. Almost half of them (five) do not speak any other foreign language apart from English. The other languages given reveal something about the area the respondents are from: the Slovak delegate also speaks Russian, the Spanish delegate speaks a little bit of Italian and Portuguese, the delegate from France speaks Spanish, the delegate from Belgium speaks French and the delegates from the Netherlands, Norway and Denmark speak German. This part of the survey appears to show that English is definitely the most important foreign language for all of them and it is not necessary for them to be able to speak another foreign language if they already speak English.



One reason that all of them speak English – besides the fact that the meetings are held in English – may be their working background. Most of them are involved in research and development, which implies that they have to be able to collect up-to-date information from their field of work; they read articles, search for information on the Internet, talk to staff in testing facilities that are often located abroad and so on. They are also in touch with companies from various countries, attend international exhibitions and conferences and, of course, have to be aware of most current products in their field of work. Basically, their reasons for using English fall into the categories of science and international business, which are typical areas in which English is used as a lingua franca.

#### **5.1.2 Requirement to prove one's knowledge**

As representing one's country at an international meeting requires a certain level of English, one of the questions was whether it was obligatory in the respondent's country to prove his/her level of English (to pass a language examination) before he/she was allowed to start attending international meetings. The main reason for the inclusion of this question in the survey was STANAG 6001, which is explained below.

Within NATO there are standardisation agreements or STANAGs. Their aim, as with other standards like ČSN (Czech State Norms), EN (European Norms) and ISO standards, is to standardise certain issues, and to offer a model, norm or measure for everybody to follow. One of these standardisation agreements is STANAG 6001 Language Proficiency Levels (currently edition 5 from 2014). The aim of this agreement is to "be used as the common standard (construct) for language curriculum and test development, for recording and reporting Standardised Language Profiles (SLPs)." (STANAG, para. 'Interoperability Requirement'). The text of the standard itself is a document marked AtrainP-5, containing six proficiency levels (0 to 5) that are described in Annex A, which "give[s] detailed definitions of the proficiency levels in the commonly-recognized language proficiency skills: 'listening', 'speaking', 'reading' and 'writing'" (para. 1.1). Based on this standard, each nation that has ratified this agreement uses it for the purpose of communicating language requirements for international staff appointments, recording and reporting, in international correspondence, measures of language proficiency and comparing national standards through a standardised table (para. 1.1.). The final evaluation from the STANAG examinations contains four digits, where, for example, SLP 3321 means Level 3 in listening, Level 3 in speaking, Level 2 in reading and Level 1 in writing (para. 1.5.). Unlike some other internationally recognised examinations there is no test

in grammar. Grammar is tested within the other skills, i.e. it is evaluated in an essay or during the oral part of the examination.

Considering the fact that there is a military language standard, it was logical to ask whether the countries who send their representatives to NATO meetings use this standard in order to make sure their representatives (both soldiers and civilian employees) have a sufficient level of English. However, eight out of 12 respondents said that it was not obligatory to pass a language examination in order to prove their level of English before they could start attending international meetings. Only four of them said it was obligatory for them and they all passed the STANAG examination. Still, five out of eight respondents from countries where a language test is not obligatory, do have a certificate proving their knowledge of English (two of them have passed the STANAG examination as well). These results show that STANAG is probably not widely used by NATO or Partnership for Peace (henceforth PFP) countries for evaluation of their representatives' level of English for the purposes of attending international meetings.

Perhaps there is no requirement to pass an extra language examination in some countries because the working position demands a good knowledge of English (as is the case in the Czech Armed Forces). Then it is of course not necessary to prove one's level of English again. However, a repeated test might be useful to make sure the user's knowledge of English has not declined.

Regardless of whether the examination is obligatory for them or not, six delegates, i.e. half of the respondents, said that they had passed the STANAG examination, five of them at Level 3 and one at Level 2. STANAG 3 compares approximately to the CAE Cambridge (Cambridge Advanced English) examination and STANAG 2 to the FCE (Cambridge First Certificate in English) examination according to the List of Standardised Examinations issued by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. Also, the Dutch respondent's level of English, even though he has not sat for the STANAG examination, is C1 (according to the Common European Framework of Reference) and one of the German delegates achieved an evaluation of 3332 in SLP (Standardisiertes Leistungsprofil), which in the German Bundeswehr is an evaluation of language skills similar to STANAG 6001. This shows that at least the results of examinations suggest that the level of English of the respondents is high and should be sufficient for communication during international meetings.

### **5.1.3 Real knowledge of English**

However, a certificate of English does not always correspond to the user's current knowledge of the language and that is why the respondents were asked how they would evaluate their current level of English. Seven of them think that their English is at advanced level, four consider their knowledge to be upper-intermediate and only one ranked his English as intermediate. The only person who thinks his English is only at intermediate level is from Denmark and he might have either underestimated himself or feel that the fact that he retired a couple of years ago has influenced his knowledge of English in a negative way. Most of the respondents rank themselves as upper-intermediate or advanced, both of which, should be sufficient for an international forum, although delegates with a level lower than advanced might face occasional problems understanding others or expressing their thoughts.

As the answers to the two questions show, the level of English of most respondents given either by examination results or by their own evaluation or both should be sufficient for international meetings. Now the right question to ask is: how do the native speakers see it? Do they feel the same about it? Therefore, the native speakers were asked whether they thought that the level of English of the non-native speakers was sufficient for the purposes of international meetings. From the answers given in the questionnaires it seems that the non-native speakers were right about their knowledge of English because five of out six of the native speakers think that most of the non-native speakers have a sufficient level of English and one native speaker even said that of all of them. Taking into account that the survey cannot be considered a good source of statistical information because the number of respondents is not high enough, it is still encouraging that the native speakers expressed such a high opinion of the non-native speakers' knowledge of English.

It is also interesting that the non-native speakers, when asked the same question, expressed the same good opinion as the native speakers. The questionnaires show that nine of out twelve non-native speakers consider the level of English of most of their non-native fellow delegates sufficient. One non-native speaker even thinks that all of them have a sufficient level of English. On the other hand, one of them believes that there are quite a few whose level of English is not sufficient.

Based on the information above, we can draw the conclusion that most of the delegates, whether native or non-native speakers, are satisfied with the level of English of their colleagues from different NATO or PfP countries. It seems that the purpose of these international meetings – to talk to each other, to

communicate, to exchange information – is very probably fulfilled. That is good news because it means that ELF serves its purpose well.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to add that the opinion of the only delegate who thinks that there are quite a few delegates whose English is not good enough for the purpose of the meetings should not be underestimated. He is from the Netherlands and was the chairman of the group for many years, so he has met many delegates from various countries. It is true that some of them do not join the discussion. One of the reasons for this might indeed be language-based: their active knowledge of English is worse than the average knowledge of other delegates around the table, which may prevent them from joining in. Nevertheless, there might be other reasons that have no connection with the language; they may be personal (perhaps some delegates are too shy to speak when they are new in the group), pragmatic (their country has no project in the area under discussion, they are not able to share information with the group as it is classified) or there might be other cultural or social reasons; these, however, are not discussed in this paper.

#### **5.1.4 Differences in English among countries**

The end of the previous sub-section leads on to the question of whether it is possible to generalise about whose command of English is better or worse in terms of countries. That is why the native speakers were asked to name the three countries that are the best and three countries that are the worst, irrespective of the order.

Highest in the rankings were Sweden (mentioned four times), the Netherlands (three times) and Norway (twice). Scandinavia was mentioned once. Apparently, Scandinavian countries (with the exception of Finland) and the Netherlands usually have the best speakers of English at the meetings.

Lowest in the rankings were Finland (mentioned four times), Greece (twice), Poland (twice); after that responses varied; the following nations were mentioned at least once: Spain, France, Italy, Turkey, Slovakia, Slovenia, Estonia.

What conclusions can be drawn from these results (although it is not the aim of this paper to find reasons for why some countries were ranked higher and some lower)?

Countries such as France, Spain, Italy and Greece may be considered worse than others, but the main reason for this does not necessarily have to be relatively lower knowledge of English but the accent taken from their mother tongues. French delegates in particular tend to pronounce words that are similar to their French cognates with a heavy French accent and usually keep this accent

for all the other words they pronounce, which makes it more difficult to understand them. Delegates from southern European countries have the same problem, especially Spanish delegates, who battle with the accent given by the mother tongue.

The “victory” of Finland as the worst is a bit of a mystery considering the excellent knowledge of English prevalent in other Scandinavian countries; it might result from the fact that Finnish is a Uralic language while English, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish and Dutch are Germanic languages, making it more difficult for Finns to learn English. The reason why some former socialist countries were mentioned is probably the fact that it took a while for the delegates from the former Eastern Bloc to achieve a sufficient level of English after the events of 1989 and decades spent learning predominantly Russian.

Another argument worth mentioning is that although some of the countries were identified as bad or worse, this does not mean that their level of English is really so much worse than others and that the main purpose of the meetings, i.e. communication, is not achieved in interaction with delegates from these countries. The fact that the group has existed for over fifteen years proves that the communication works satisfactorily and simply requires more patience and tolerance than meetings where only delegates of a common mother tongue are present. For purposes of illustration we might mention that the previous chairman of the group was from Greece and even though his English was not perfect, he managed to chair the group. Of course, patience and greater concentration were needed on both sides but his example shows that it is not necessary to speak English perfectly in order to use it as a lingua franca.

As the respondent from Norway added to the questionnaire, “[a]nother problem is that nations often send their best English speakers, when instead they should send their best expert, because we are a group of experts. I have several times in the past been the interpreter for other colleagues.”. This quote expresses the whole idea behind ELF: the reason why delegates attend the meetings is to exchange information, to discuss various expert matters, to create standards and so on. They should be experts, and nobody expects their English to be perfect. They need English principally as a tool to allow them to fulfil all the tasks of the group. This proves that ELF is used in an international environment to communicate, to exchange information and that if this aim is reached, it does not matter so much what the level of English of the participants of the discussion is.

## **5.2 Questions related to international meetings**

As can be seen from the answers to the first question in this section of the questionnaire – “How long have you attended international NATO group meetings?” – most of the respondents have attended the meetings for more than three years (six of them for more than three but less than six and five of them for more than six years). Only one respondent has attended the meetings for less than three years. Thus, all the respondents know the international environment very well and were able to give valid feedback.

Then the delegates were asked three questions that relate to understanding what is being said and to actively joining discussions during the meetings. These questions are of course closely connected to the level of English of the respondents but they focus more on practice than theoretical evaluation of the knowledge of English. As stated above, most respondents believe their English is either upper-intermediate or advanced, so they should be able to understand and interact with others around the table with no major obstacles, although a minor problem may sometimes occur.

Six of the respondents say that they have no problems understanding what is being said during the meetings and five say that they have only minor problems with understanding. Therefore, there is only one respondent (a delegate from Spain) who admits that he has occasional serious problems with understanding. This means that almost all of the respondents face either minor problems or none at all. It is interesting, however, that there is no direct link between their current level of English and the option they chose when answering the question. Only four out of seven respondents who claimed their current knowledge of English was advanced said they had no problems at all with understanding and two out of four who claimed their current knowledge of English was upper-intermediate also said that they had no problems with understanding. It is of course necessary to take into account that their own evaluation of their current level of English does not have to be very precise, as some of them might have underestimated themselves slightly and others might have been too optimistic about their knowledge. It matters less how we evaluate our level of English than how our English works in real life.

On the other hand, it was surprising to see that six out of twelve respondents had no problems with understanding at all. In international communication minor problems with understanding are common, especially because there are on average about twenty countries around the table and non-native speakers speak English with so many different accents; therefore, it would seem

impossible to avoid completely situations where it is necessary to ask for clarification.

Yet, there are examples of delegates who probably have no problems with understanding. The respondent from the Netherlands (the one who replied that he had never experienced any problems) is a former chairman of the group. As chairman he had to answer many questions, comment on many issues, react to discussions, etc., and he never hesitated. Also, delegates who are non-native speakers but have stayed in one of the countries where English is the mother tongue for a certain time usually have no problems with understanding as, for example, one of the German respondents, who has worked in the United States.

A positive feeling about understanding during the meetings is also present in the two questions that cover discussion around the table.

Eight out of twelve respondents say that they rarely get lost in a discussion around the table, three say they never get lost in a discussion and only one admits that he gets lost sometimes (he is the respondent from Spain who admits facing serious problems with understanding during the meetings). Again, the respondents are very confident in their abilities. It is remarkable that the two respondents (one from the Netherlands and one from Germany) mentioned as good examples in the previous paragraph are among those who say they never get lost in a discussion. It demonstrates their very good knowledge of English.

Seven respondents say that it has never happened to them that they would decide not to join a discussion around the table just because they were not confident enough in their English. To two of them, this has happened only rarely and to another two, it happens sometimes. As the six out of seven respondents who consider their current level of English advanced say it never happens to them, obviously their confidence influences directly their contribution to discussions. However, it seems to be very promising that the level of English of those three delegates who say it happens to them only rarely, is said to be either upper-intermediate or intermediate, which means that even though they do not think their English is perfect, it does not influence their willingness to speak in front of all the delegates. Again, the delegate from Spain, who admitted problems in the two previous questions, admits that sometimes he does not join the discussion.

It is, however, surprising that one of the respondents with advanced English also admits that she sometimes does not join discussions. This probably implies that in some cases, a high level of English might not be enough for the delegates to feel confident enough to speak. Some people are generally shy than others and it is more difficult for them to speak in front of a bigger audience. In this case,

the Hungarian delegate really is a shy lady and the reasons for her occasional silence are quite probably more of a personal nature rather than a linguistic. There may be a connection with other factors that define international communication, such as cultural and social identities, gender aspects and power relations in the group.

Still, it feels necessary to make a comment which is related to aspects of international communication other than linguistic ones. It is understandable if some people are shy and do not feel confident enough to speak, but the international environment is very tolerant and patient if somebody needs more time to express his or her thoughts. Mistakes in grammar and pronunciation are tolerated, as is seen in Section 6.1 below. Also, all non-native respondents of the survey said that it was most important for them to understand what other non-native speakers were saying even though they made occasional mistakes in grammar or syntax, which proves what ELF is for: communication no matter how imperfect the speaker's English is.

Moreover, when knowledge of English fails, non-native speakers apparently know what to do. As Jenkins et al. (2011) suggest, "ELF speakers [...] exhibit a high degree of interactional and pragmatic competence" (p. 293), which means they are aware of problems of international communication and are able to react to them by adapting their language to the situation. In the questionnaire, when non-native speakers were asked whether they adjusted their English due to the fact that the NATO group is an international forum and that the level of English of individual delegates can differ, seven out of twelve said they did and the remaining five said they did not. Evidently, there are non-native speakers who are conscious of features of international communication and act accordingly, while there are some who are not aware of the specifics. Still this does not have to mean that they lack interactional competence; they might use paraphrasing skills quite often even without realizing it, for instance.

### **6. Native speakers**

As mentioned above, six native speakers contributed by filling in the questionnaires: two from Canada, two from the USA and two from Great Britain. Three of them have attended or attended the meetings for more than a year but less than three years, two for more than three but less than six years and one for more than six years. Four speak a foreign language – French; the Canadians of course, one respondent from the UK and one from the USA, although their typical response was "I speak a bit of French", so it is probably not advanced knowledge.



Such replies might be a direct consequence of ELF: if someone's mother tongue is English, he or she does not really need to learn a foreign language.

### **6.1 Do mistakes matter?**

One of the aims of the survey in relation to native speakers was to find out how much they mind when non-native speakers use English incorrectly. Four of them stated that they do not mind non-native speaker's grammar or syntax mistakes unless they prevent them from understanding. Two of them stated that they notice mistakes but that they do not mind. Such a result illustrates the tolerance of native speakers; they do not tend to judge or blame non-native speakers for making mistakes, confirming what the authors suggested in the previous section about the tolerance and patience of the international environment.

When non-native speakers were asked whether they noticed non-native speakers' mistakes, nine of them answered that sometimes they notice mistakes but they do not care about them, two of them said that they do not pay attention to mistakes, they only concentrate on understanding what is being said, and only one would rather that non-native speakers did not make mistakes. It can be seen here again that achieving the communicative aim and content of the speech act is more relevant to the delegates than the format or structure of that speech act.

These answers confirm that "typical errors that most English teachers would consider in urgent need of correction and remediation, [...], appear to be generally unproblematic and no obstacle to communicative success" (Seidlhofer, 2004, p. 220) when English is used as a lingua franca. In ELF, grammar mistakes are not considered mistakes and the message of the speech act is more important.

As one of the respondents from the USA adds to one of his answers: "[s]uccessful communication requires patience and effort. I honestly cannot think of an instance where I could not achieve proper understanding when those principles were employed, and it did not require an extraordinary effort to do so." Another respondent from Canada commented: "I have been part of four different NATO meetings [...]. Having lived in Germany, and having been born in a French province in Canada, I am aware of mistakes I make in their language and that they make in English. I prefer people try and don't mind the mistakes."

The questionnaire also contained two questions asking respondents for examples of grammar/syntax or pronunciation mistakes that they had noticed, but typically the respondents did not remember any examples. As one of them says, "they are usually random occurrences". However, interesting notes were

added by some of the respondents. One of the respondents from the UK suggests: "There are more cultural misunderstandings than any caused by syntax. In this regard US and UK delegates are likely to have the same challenge," which proves again that grammar or syntax mistakes are not so relevant as some teachers of English might believe and that often reasons for unintelligibility are personal, cultural, or sociological rather than linguistic.

Other comments were linked to pronunciation mistakes. The same UK respondent says: "Can't think of any [pronunciation mistakes]! Once you get used to the accent (like Germans and the 'V' instead of 'W', it's no barrier." One of the Canadian respondents notes: "Sometimes there are humorous accents when pronouncing words; it is interesting that English speakers are often least likely to know other languages in NATO meetings, they should not be critical of others." The last comment is from a US respondent and it covers both pronunciation and grammar/syntax mistakes: "Honestly, there are regions in the US where the English spoken is more challenging for me to understand than I encountered in Europe (at NATO meetings) and in other countries. Non-native English speakers, especially, tend to be more meticulous with respect to grammar. Pronunciations and syntax are easily worked through once one has a rudimentary understanding of the language (pronunciation of certain vowels, consonants or syllables) of the non-native English speakers."

## **6.2 Should native speakers adapt?**

This section will attempt to discover whether native speakers are aware of specific features of communication in an international environment. As mentioned above, native speakers "seem to be aware of the challenges of intercultural communication, [but] they seem unable to adopt effective accommodation strategies" (Jenkins et al., 2011, p. 299).

### **6.2.1 Adapting in general**

All six respondents believe that, in general, it is necessary for native speakers of English to adjust their speech when non-native speakers are involved in the interaction. When the question is aimed at them personally, they all agree that they feel that they should adjust and change from their home "mode of speaking" to an international "mode of speaking" because they either speak too fast (mentioned three times) or use some vocabulary that could be unknown to non-native speakers (mentioned four times). One of the US delegates mentioned problems that can be caused by slang terms. None of them mentioned less clear pronunciation or non-standard accent.

When non-native speakers were asked a similar question (“When listening to native speakers, if you do not understand, what is usually the reason?”), they chose the following options: they (native speakers) speak too fast (mentioned eight times), they speak with a regional accent (eight times), they do not pronounce clearly enough (five times), they use technical or general vocabulary I do not know (both mentioned once).

Apparently, non-native speakers are not very satisfied with how native speakers speak and they often complain about a non-standard accent and less clear pronunciation, while native speakers do not mention these two reasons at all. Two of the non-native speakers even expressed it in a less diplomatic way: “They [native speakers] usually don’t care about the person who is listening” (French respondent) and “[they are] often very self-centred, [they think that] others should do like us, [they] use short terms” (Norwegian respondent).

Only two out of twelve non-native respondents think that it is not necessary for English native speakers to adjust their speech when non-native speakers are involved in the interaction.

It is evident from the answers discussed above that native speakers are aware that it might be difficult for non-native speakers to understand them, but do they actually adjust their speech (by slowing down, not using idioms, or phrasal verbs, and concentrating on clear pronunciation, for example) during the meetings? Two of them said they do it automatically without thinking about it. Three of them said they do it consciously most of the time. One admitted that he tries but he tends to return to his normal “mode of speaking” rather quickly.

When the non-native speakers were asked what their personal experience was; concerning whether native speakers adjusted their speech during the meetings, half of them (six) said that some of the native speakers did, four respondents thought that most of them did and two respondents said that native speakers did not adjust their speech.

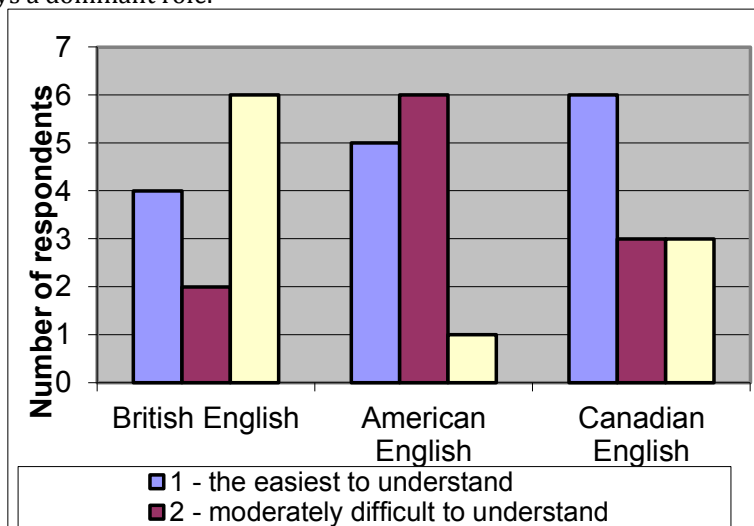
The answers presented indicate that native speakers at least try to adjust their speech, even if they are not always successful. If they were, the reaction to this question would have been much more positive from the non-native speakers. Yet, it is necessary to realise that it is not easy to change one’s mode of speaking and it takes some time before it can be done subconsciously.

When the native speakers were asked whether their experience of international meetings had influenced the way they speak in an international environment, two of them said “yes, absolutely” and four of them said the way they speak had changed quite a lot. This means that the native speakers believe they do not speak in the way they do at home when they are in an international

environment. This only confirms what was noted above: native speakers try to adjust their speech and they are able to see the difference between a home and international “mode of speaking”, but according to what the non-native speakers say, it is a challenge that native speakers are not always able to cope with successfully.

As there are differences between British, American and Canadian English, the non-native speakers were also asked which countries’ delegates they find easier to understand by marking countries on a scale of 1 – 3 where 1 = the easiest to understand, 3 = the most difficult to understand. The winner of this “contest” seems to be American English because it got only one 3 and the highest number of 2’s; it also got almost the same number of 1’s as Canada (the USA got five and Canada got six), as is shown in the graph below.

It means that five non-native speakers consider American English the easiest to understand, while six of them do not think it is the most difficult to understand and only one of them thinks it is the most difficult to understand. It seems that the respondents prefer American English. One of the reasons may be the influence of the media (American films, TV series, news channels like CNN etc.), which is one of the areas where English is used as a lingua franca and where the USA plays a dominant role.



Graph 1: Comparison of British, American and Canadian English by non-native speakers

British English does not seem to be very popular among the respondents; it got the highest number of 3's (six, while Canadian English got three and American English only one). This is somewhat surprising because, at least in the Czech Republic, most textbooks for English classrooms are British (published by Cambridge, Longman, Oxford, etc.) and the English taught at schools is predominantly British.

The graph might also show another issue, though in an oblique way: it might suggest that American and Canadian delegates are somewhat better at adjusting their speech to an international environment than British delegates, which could have influenced how the non-native speakers rated the countries.

From what has just been explained, it is apparent that native speakers usually try to adjust and are aware of the problem but according to non-native speakers they are not always successful. Non-native speakers should perhaps put more pressure on native speakers to make sure that they realise when they are not understood. The questionnaire did not show a convincing result in the frame of pressure because three native speakers said they occasionally felt pressure to adjust their speech or were asked to slow down or speak clearly and another three said they had never felt any pressure.

Applying pressure might not be easy, however. International meetings require a certain level of politeness, so sometimes it might be very difficult to interrupt the speaker, as this does not seem polite or appropriate. This may be one of the reasons why the pressure from non-native speakers is not convincing enough. If once asked to slow down or speak up a native speaker adjusts his/her speech only for a short time and then starts speaking fast or quietly again, non-native speakers might be even more hesitant to apply pressure by repeating the request.

### **6.2.2 Being "too English"?**

Another problem that can be an obstacle in communication lies in the area of vocabulary. As Seidlhofer (2004) points out, "[u]nsurprisingly, not being familiar with certain vocabulary items can give rise to problems, particularly when speakers lack paraphrasing skills" (p. 220). This, however, does not involve only common vocabulary that speakers of ELF need, i.e. general vocabulary and special vocabulary (such as the technical vocabulary used by the NATO group). Idioms, colloquial expressions and phrasal verbs can cause misunderstanding as well.

Seidlhofer (2011) uses the term "unilateral idiomacity", i.e. "the use by one speaker of marked idiomatic expressions attested in ENL that may well be

unknown and unintelligible to the other participants in ELF interactions” (p. 134). This may quite often happen when at least one of the participants is a native speaker who does not realise that his or her partners in the talk may not be familiar with the idiom. She explains that while native speakers use idioms as conventionally preconstructed phrases they are familiar with (p. 130) to make their communication easier and faster, non-native speakers cannot rely on shared knowledge of these expressions, as their meaning usually cannot be guessed from the meaning of the individual words and it is impossible for every non-native speaker to know all idioms. This means that if an idiom is used in an ELF conversation, it can slow down the communication or interrupt it because the conversation can continue again only after the meaning of that fixed phrase is explained or paraphrased. In ELF usage these expressions work against the ease and speed of any conversation.

To shed light upon whether native speakers are aware of this problem, one of the questions in the questionnaire was worded in the following way: “Have you ever thought that you could be considered too English by non-native speakers and that this “Englishness” could prevent smooth communication in the international environment?” Two respondents answered yes and four answered no, which indicates that native speakers are not always aware of this problem.

When the non-native speakers were asked about reasons why they do not understand native speakers, half of them mentioned the fact that native speakers use phrases, phrasal verbs and idioms that they do not know. Moreover, when the non-native speakers were asked to give examples of situations where they did not understand, while they did not come up with really concrete examples, there were some interesting comments.

The French respondent wrote the following: “Private jokes, subjects of conversation which are very ‘Anglo-Saxon’”. The Hungarian respondent noted: “A speech full of idioms and phrases” and the Greek respondent added: “Usually the Great Britain and American delegates [...] use phrases and idioms that are not widely known.” These three examples probably represent the view of many other non-native speakers who have talked to native speakers and had to deal with idioms or collocations with which they were not familiar.

A possible way to make native speakers aware of this problem is language-oriented training (see the following section).

### **6.2.3 Is training necessary?**

Jenkins et al. (2011) mention that it might be useful if native speakers were “trained in intercultural communications skills” (p. 299). Such training could of

course cover a lot of aspects of intercultural communication (cultural, sociological, psychological and so on) if necessary, but above all it should direct native speakers' attention to the use of language.

Native speakers were therefore asked whether they thought it would be useful for them to attend lessons or lectures on how to use English in an international environment before they started attending international meetings. Three of them said that it would be useful, while two of them that it would not be useful.

The sixth, who is from Canada, crossed out both options. When asked for clarification, he replied: "With regard to question 15 my thoughts are that it depends on the member. Generally if it contributes to the overall meeting then yes, if they had more confidence in the group then it would be helpful. However, if it was seen to be insulting to the member simply because their accent or pronunciation was not perfect, then I would say no."

This, of course, brings another, hitherto unconsidered aspect into the discussion about native speakers and ELF. It is essential not to forget that native speakers are partners in many conversations that happen all around the world every day and they certainly have an opinion about the use of ELF, which is discussed below (see Section 6.3), but it must not be forgotten that native speakers need support in adjusting to this new situation and becoming good conversation partners. As it has been shown, native speakers are quite tolerant towards mistakes in grammar, syntax and pronunciation, so the same tolerance should be shown by non-native speakers towards the rapid, unclear or idiomatic speech of native speakers.

In any case, the results are not very clear: some respondents believe training would be of value, some do think otherwise. The authors of the paper claim that a short lecture or seminar covering not only cultural and social aspects of international communication but also its language would be useful. A lecture where possibly tricky situations were explained, some simple rules given on, for instance, vocabulary (idioms, collocations) to avoid, and some guidance was offered (in terms of whether and how to adjust the speech) would help prepare some native speakers for contingencies. It would certainly be beneficial for the purposes of international communication.

This opinion is supported by the answers to one of the questions in the questionnaire. Three respondents think that the English used during meetings is only a little different from the English they use in their country; two of them think it is not different at all. Only one believes that it is quite different. If the language used at the meetings is not very different (at least in the eyes of native

speakers), doesn't this mean that non-native speakers face an even bigger challenge?

Without any training, it probably takes a few meetings for native speakers to realise that it is necessary for them to adjust the way they speak. Some of them may never realise that there is a problem. A short language-based seminar would familiarise them with specifics of international communication even before they started attending the meetings, which would make the start in the group easier for the delegate as well as his future non-native-speaker partners in conversation.

### **6.3 Attitude towards lingua franca**

The last questions in the questionnaire were aimed at discovering how native speakers feel about ELF. The term "lingua franca" was not used in the questionnaires, however, as the respondents might not be familiar with it.

Unfortunately, the answers to the question as to whether respondents think that the fact that so many people around the world use English even though they are not English native speakers influences their mother tongue, did not produce an unambiguous result. Two respondents think it does influence it, another two think it influences it to a certain extent and the remaining two think it does not influence it. However, such a result still gives an interesting insight into the thinking of native speakers. Each pair of respondents probably represents a different group of native speakers. The 375 million native speakers is not a homogenous group with just one opinion.

Contrariwise, answers to the last question – "How do you feel about your mother tongue being used by millions of people all around the world?" – were much clearer. It is remarkable that native speakers are quite optimistic about this and view it in a positive way. They are proud of it (mentioned twice), happy about it (mentioned six times), they think it has a positive effect on English (mentioned four times) and they think it is an advantage for them while travelling or doing business (mentioned six times). The only slightly negative aspect chosen was: "I'm afraid English native speakers rely on it and think they don't need to learn foreign languages" (mentioned three times). This is probably the reason why four out of six respondents stated that they speak only "a bit of French" when answering one of the first questions in the questionnaire; they do not need to speak a foreign language well (see the introduction to Section 6). Other (rather negative) options that were offered in the questionnaire, for example "I'm not happy about it", "I'm afraid it'll have a negative effect on English", were not chosen by any of the native-speaker respondents.



The commentary on the questionnaires can thus be concluded in an optimistic way. Although there are probably many native speakers who are not so happy about English being used as a lingua franca and are afraid that it will change their mother tongue in a way that they cannot influence, it is good to know that some native speakers enjoy the fact that their own language has spread all around the world and is used by so many people in so many different countries.

### **Conclusion**

English has become a new language phenomenon, a global lingua franca. It differs significantly from previous lingua francas that never reached global dimensions and it functions in conditions that are also very different from the lingua francas of the past, when there was no Internet, no air travel and the world was not as interlinked as it is today. English is very special in this respect and it has proven its quality as a communication tool since the 1950s, when the story of the “globalisation” of English is said to have started (Crystal, 2003, p. 12). This paper has concentrated on ELF at international meetings, but there are many other areas where English works as a useful communication tool.

A NATO working group is a brilliant example of a community that uses English as a lingua franca. It offers great insight into the way communication functions. This paper has attempted to describe the communication of delegates and their feelings about the language they share. It seems that they are satisfied with English, which is seen not only from the questionnaires but also from the fact that the group has existed for more than 15 years.

Of course, this does not mean that the communication is always flawless. Every delegate needs time to learn the environment, conditions and rules, while occasional problems with understanding are not exceptions but the very reason why international communication needs more flexibility and adaptability than communication at home. However, where tolerance and patience are applied, there is no obstacle on the way to the communication goals which are the main reasons for any lingua franca in the first place.

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## Appendix 1

### Questionnaire for non-native speakers

1. Which country are you from?
2. What is your mother tongue?
3. Can you speak another foreign language besides English? If yes, which one(s)?  
 Yes, I speak ...  
 No
4. Is it obligatory in your country to prove your level of English (to pass a language exam) before you can start attending international (NATO) meetings?  
Yes   
No
5. Have you passed the STANAG 6001 language exam in English? If yes, at what level?  
Yes  Level 1  Level 2  Level 3  Level 4  Level 5   
No
6. If you have not passed the STANAG 6001 exam, do you have another certificate proving your knowledge of English?  
Yes  Name of the certificate (and the level)  
No
7. What do you think is your current level of English?  
 **Elementary**  
(You can understand many simple everyday expressions in familiar situations and sometimes grasp what the basic topic of a conversation in English is. You can produce understandable questions and answers involving information above basic.)

- Pre-intermediate**  
(You can understand the gist of a common conversation in English, though not in detail and you can produce English well enough to take part if spoken carefully. You can initiate conversation and can perform most everyday social and practical functions to survive comfortably.)
- Intermediate**  
(You can understand the gist of a common conversation involving fluent speakers, provided that some allowances are made, or occasional help given. You can produce well enough to make substantial relevant contributions and to get full information from other speakers.)
- Upper Intermediate**  
(You can understand well enough to hold continuous conversation with a native speaker, even where the speaker does not, or cannot, adapt their language to a foreigner. You can produce well enough to initiate new topics, change the subject and generally take part in the management of the conversation.)
- Advanced**  
(You can understand native speakers of everyday standard English, even when not being directly addressed, and you can therefore take part in a normal interaction on almost the same terms as a native speaker. You can produce speech fluent enough to convey feeling, to argue and maintain point of view.)
- Proficient**  
(Your English is of native-speaker standard in every skill.)
8. How long have you attended international NATO group meetings?
- Less than a year.
- More than a year but less than three years.
- More than three years but less than six years.
- More than six years.
9. Understanding what is being said during the meetings:
- I have no problems with understanding.
- I have only minor problems with understanding.
- I have serious problems with understanding occasionally.
- I have serious problems with understanding quite often.

10. Do you sometimes get a bit lost in a discussion around the table?  
 Yes, quite frequently.  
 Yes, sometimes.  
 Yes, but very rarely.  
 No, never.
11. Do you sometimes decide not to join a discussion around the table just because you do not feel confident enough about your English?  
 Yes, quite frequently.  
 Yes, sometimes.  
 Yes, but very rarely.  
 No, never.
12. When listening to **non-native speakers** of English, if you do not understand what they are saying, the reason usually is (choose more than one option if necessary):  
 They speak with a heavy accent that comes from their mother tongue.  
 They don't pronounce clearly enough.  
 They use vocabulary I do not know.  
 They make grammar mistakes that prevent me from understanding.  
 Other:
13. Do you occasionally notice that non-native speakers make grammar or syntax<sup>20</sup> mistakes?  
 No, I do not pay attention to mistakes, I only concentrate on understanding what is being said.  
 Yes, sometimes I notice mistakes but I don't care as long as I can understand.  
 Yes, sometimes I notice and I would rather they did not make mistakes.
14. Can you give an example/examples of a situation/situations when you did not understand? Are there any typical mistakes in grammar or pronunciation that prevent you from understanding? You can also give a random example.

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<sup>20</sup> syntax = the way words are put together to form a sentence

15. What is more important for you during the meetings?
- To understand what other non-native speakers are saying even if they make some grammar or syntax<sup>2</sup> mistakes from time to time.
- That other non-native speakers have a good level of English, so that they speak without mistakes.
16. Do you think that the level of English of non-native speakers who attend the meetings is sufficient for the purposes of an international meeting?
- Yes, all of them have a sufficient level of English.
- Yes, most of them have a sufficient level of English.
- No, there are quite a few whose level of English is not sufficient.
17. When listening to **native speakers** of English: if you do not understand what they are saying, the reason usually is (choose more than one option if necessary):
- They speak too fast.
- They speak with a heavy (regional) accent.
- They don't pronounce clearly enough.
- They use technical vocabulary I don't know.
- They use general vocabulary I don't know.
- They use phrases, phrasal verbs<sup>21</sup> or idioms<sup>22</sup> I don't know (they are "too English").
- Other:
18. Can you give an example/examples of a situation/situations when you did not understand?

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<sup>21</sup> phrasal verbs = verbs that consist of a verb and a preposition that form a new word when used together and the meaning cannot be guessed based on the knowledge of the meaning of the verb and the preposition when used separately (e.g. to run into, take after, look forward, hang up, break down)

<sup>22</sup> idioms = phrases where the words together have a meaning that is different from the dictionary definitions or the individual words (e.g. It's all Greek to me. It's not my cup of tea. It doesn't ring a bell.)

19. Do you feel that it is necessary for English native speakers to adjust their speech due to the fact that non-native speakers are involved in the interaction?
- Yes  
 No
20. Based on your experience, do English native speakers adjust their speech during the meetings?
- Yes, all of them do.  
 Yes, most of them do.  
 Yes, some of them do.  
 No, they don't.
21. Which countries' delegates do you find easier to understand? Please mark the countries on a scale of 1 = the easiest to understand, 3 = the most difficult to understand:
- Great Britain  
 USA  
 Canada
22. Do you (as a non-native speaker) adjust your English due to the fact that the NATO group is an international forum and that the level of English of individual delegates can differ?
- Yes  
 No

**Thank you very much. Your help is greatly appreciated.**  
**If there is anything you want to add or comment on, please use this space:**

## Appendix 2

### Questionnaire for native speakers

1. Which country are you from?
2. How long have you attended international NATO group meetings?  
 Less than a year.  
 More than a year but less than three years.  
 More than three years but less than six years.  
 More than six years.
3. Can you speak any language other than your mother tongue?  
 Yes, I speak...  
 No.
4. Do you think that the level of English of non-native speakers is sufficient for the purposes of international meetings?  
 Yes, all of them have a sufficient level of English.  
 Yes, most of them have a sufficient level of English.  
 No, there are quite a few whose level of English is not sufficient.
5. Speaking about countries where English is not a mother tongue, do you think it is possible to make a general statement about whose command of English is better and whose worse (i.e. when you speak to somebody or listen to him/her talking at the meeting, are there delegates who you like to speak to or prefer because you know their level of English is good and your conversation will be without misunderstandings and sufficiently fluent)?  
The best (name three countries):  
The worst (name three countries):  
Note: The order is not important; there is no first, second or third place.
6. How much do you mind non-native speakers' grammar or syntax<sup>23</sup> mistakes?

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<sup>23</sup> syntax = the way words are put together to form a sentence



- Not at all unless they prevent me from understanding.
  - I usually notice mistakes but I do not mind.
  - I usually notice mistakes and I'd rather they didn't make them.
  - 7. Can you give an example/examples of grammar or syntax mistakes that non-native speakers tend to make? These may be mistakes that prevented you from understanding, mistakes that non-native speakers repeat quite often no matter what country they come from, mistakes that you find annoying or any random mistakes that you remember.
  - 8. Can you give an example/examples of pronunciation mistakes that non-native speakers tend to make? These may be mistakes that prevented you from understanding, mistakes that non-native speakers repeat quite often no matter what country they come from, mistakes that you find annoying or any random mistakes that you remember.
  - 9. Generally speaking, do you feel that it is necessary for native speakers of English to adjust their speech due to the fact that non-native speakers are involved in the interaction?
    - Yes
    - No
  - 10. Speaking about you personally, do you feel that you should adjust and change from your home "mode of speaking" to an international "mode of speaking"?
    - Yes
      - If your answer is yes, can you specify the reason?
      - I think I speak too fast.
      - I don't think I pronounce clearly enough.
      - I don't think I have a standard accent.
      - Some of the vocabulary I normally use may be unknown to non-native speakers.
      - Other reasons, please specify:
-

- No, because I don't think my English needs adjustment for an international environment.
- No, I have never thought about it.
11. While speaking, do you consciously adjust your speech (e.g. by slowing down, not using idioms, or phrasal verbs, concentrating on clear pronunciation etc.) due to the fact that non-native speakers are listening?
- Yes, I do it automatically without thinking about it.
- Yes, I do it consciously most of the time.
- Yes, I try to but I tend to return to my normal "mode" of speaking rather quickly.
- Usually I have to be reminded or asked.
- No, not really.
12. Have you ever felt pressure to adjust your speech / been asked to slow down or speak clearly?
- Yes, quite often.
- Yes, occasionally.
- No, never.
13. Have you ever thought that you could be considered "too English" by non-native speakers and that this "Englishness" could prevent smooth communication in an international environment? (Being "too English" means using phrases, phrasal verbs<sup>24</sup> or idioms<sup>25</sup> that non-native speakers might not be familiar with.)
- Yes
- No

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<sup>24</sup> phrasal verbs = verbs that consist of a verb and a preposition that form a new word when used together and the meaning cannot be guessed based on the knowledge of the meaning of the verb and the preposition when used separately (e.g. to run into, take after, look forward, hang up, break down)

<sup>25</sup> idioms = phrases where the words together have a meaning that is different from the dictionary definitions or the individual words (e.g. It's all Greek to me. It's not my cup of tea. It doesn't ring a bell.)

14. Do you feel that the English language used during the meetings is different than the English that is used in your country? (The reasons can be various, e.g. limited vocabulary, shorter sentences, less/no idioms or collocations, special phrases used only in an international environment, simplified grammar)
- Yes, absolutely.  
 Yes, quite a lot.  
 Yes, a little but not greatly.  
 No, not at all.
15. Do you think it would be useful for native speakers to attend lessons/lectures on how to use English in an international environment before they started attending international meetings?
- Yes  
 No
16. Do you feel that your experience of international meetings with non-native speakers has influenced the way you speak in an international environment (when you compare your first meeting with how you feel about it today)?
- Yes, absolutely.  
 Yes, quite a lot.  
 Yes, partly.  
 No, not at all.
17. Do you think that the fact that so many people around the world use English even if they are not English native speakers influences your mother tongue?
- Yes, absolutely.  
 Yes, to a certain extent.  
 No, I don't think so.
18. How do you feel about your mother tongue being used by millions of people all around the world to communicate with each other even if they are not English native speakers? You can choose more than one option if necessary.
- I feel proud of my mother tongue.  
 I am happy that so many people around the world learn and use English.



- I think it has a positive effect on English.
- I think it's an advantage for me, e.g. while travelling abroad in my free-time or while doing business with foreign partners.
- I don't care.
- I'm not happy about it.
- I'm afraid English native speakers rely on it and think they don't need to learn foreign languages.
- I'm afraid it will have a negative effect on English.
- Other:

**Thank you very much. Your help is greatly appreciated.**  
**If there is anything you want to add or comment on, please use this space:**