

# **Multilingualism, language awareness and identity: The use of English as a *lingua franca* as opposed to local languages and Esperanto**

Vittorio Dell'Aquila & Ida Stria  
(Forskningscentrum för Europeisk Flerspråkighet & University of Warsaw)

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This paper presents the attitudes of speakers of English as a lingua franca (hereafter ELF) towards languages they use in mobility, comparing these attitudes to those of Esperanto speakers (as a lingua franca) in similar situations (Iannàccaro 2002, Fiedler & Brosch 2022) on the basis of the results from three case studies. Two of these studies are part of the MIME project, focusing on mobility and inclusion and their relationship to the formal, non-formal, and informal acquisition of languages in the host area. The third study is part of a long-term project on Esperanto, exploring identity and language awareness.

The first case study concerned mobility and language learning among university students in Europe. The analysis addresses their attitudes towards using ELF in multilingual environments and/or towards the local languages, as well as their self-perception as ELF speakers. The second case study examined the attitudes of highly skilled professionals in international corporations and universities in Vasa/Vaasa, Finland. We focused on the use of English as both a working language and a lingua franca, as well as their perceptions of English and the town's two official languages, Swedish and Finnish (Gardner & Lambert 1972; Mazzoli, Lupica Spagnolo & Dell'Aquila 2024). The data on Esperanto comes from qualitative interviews with advanced, active Esperanto speakers. The focus was on their motives for learning the language and staying in the Esperanto movement (Pavlenko 2007).

On the whole, most informants perceive English as a useful tool in international communication: it is considered a kind of "official" lingua franca, especially of the EU (Hult 2017); knowledge of English is a de facto requirement for at least initial superficial inclusion in the target communities (Iannàccaro, Dell'Aquila & Stria 2022). However, the interviewees declare that real inclusion requires competence in the languages of the recipient area (Pavlenko & Norton 2007). On the other hand, many Esperanto users briefly mentioned English as a language for instrumental purposes, but considered Esperanto as the language of inclusion both in the Esperanto community and as a key to learning local languages (Stria 2021).

We contrast the use of English and Esperanto, showing that language proficiency is not the key to inclusion: it is instead the language itself and its connection to a speech community that matters most. Sociolinguistic awareness is a key motivation to learn languages and plays a salient role in shaping the attitudes of the participants.

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