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**(UN)INTELLIGIBILITY IN THE CONTEXT OF ENGLISH AS  
A LINGUA FRANCA: A STUDY WITH FRENCH AND  
BRAZILIANS SPEAKERS**

**CAMPINA GRANDE - PB**

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Sumé - PB

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**THE (UN)INTELLIGIBILITY IN THE CONTEXT OF  
ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA: A STUDY WITH FRENCH  
AND BRAZILIAN SPEAKERS**

Defendida em \_\_\_\_\_ de \_\_\_\_\_ de \_\_\_\_\_.

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## 1 Introduction

The ongoing growth experienced by the community of non-native speakers of English – whose members, according to Crystal (2008), outnumber the native English-speaking users roughly 4 to 1 – has created the appropriate conditions to study and describe the use of English as a lingua franca (henceforth ELF), i.e. as a “lingual medium of communication between people of different mother tongues, for whom it is a second language” (SAMARIN, 1987, p.371, *apud* SEIDLHOFER, 2004, p.211).

Nowadays most of the interactions involving the use of English as a Second Language or as a Foreign Language (for short, ESL and EFL respectively) do not entail the participation of any native speakers (SEIDLHOFER, 2002). Furthermore, the vast majority of verbal interactions in English do not involve any mother tongue speakers at all. For that reason, English is being regarded as the world’s main international language. Numerically speaking, this means that a group of about 1.5 billion non-native speakers of English use the language to communicate with other non-native speakers from different L1 backgrounds (JENKINS, 2002). English, then, is being more used as an L2 than as a mother tongue, since the number of native speakers is estimated by Crystal (1997) to total around 337 million. As a result of these figures, “English is being shaped at least as much by its non-native speakers as by its native speakers” (SEIDLHOFER, 2005: 339). Hence, a growing number of linguists and Language Acquisition (LA) researchers, such as Crystal (2008), Seidlhofer (2001), Jenkins (1998), Widdowson (1994) and Llorca (2004), are sharing the view that the language is no longer solely owned by the native-speaking communities. This fact does not only emphasize the role of English as an international lingua franca; it also reveals a great deal of change in learners’ goals and needs.

Until fairly recently, the varieties of English used by its native speakers – markedly, Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GA) – were unquestionably adopted as norms for the teaching of the language. However, the expansion of English throughout the world and the consequent emergence of different varieties of the language have caused some linguists and educators to question the effectiveness of using native-speaker models to prepare learners for interactions in international settings (JENKINS, 2002). According to Jenkins (1998), the primary motivation for the majority of learners of English is *not* to communicate with native speakers, but to interact effectively with other non-native

speakers from a broad range of mother tongue backgrounds. Such a change in learners' goals and needs has inevitably influenced English Language Teaching (ELT) norms and models. Consequently, teaching orientations are gradually moving from the native speaker to the non-native speaker (CRYSTAL, 2008). Thus, what would have been refuted 50 years ago by the ELT curriculum appears to be a pressing necessity now: teaching models based on the needs of non-native learners. In other words, models for ELT which do not require from learners a native-like performance in English.

In addition to this emerging possibility of using the language, manifestly as a lingua franca especially among non-native speakers, there are several other arguments which dispute the efficiency of demanding from learners the acquisition of a native-like performance in English. Concerning their accent, here are some relevant justifications highlighted by Field (2003) for adopting the intelligibility as a pronunciation target for learners of ESL and/or EFL to achieve, instead of a native-speaker model: (1) many speakers express their individual and national identities through their foreign accent; (2) many learners do not have the opportunity to acquire a native-like accent; and (3) the time wasted on the acquisition of a native-like accent could be better spent on other areas.

If a native-like accent is no longer the ultimate pronunciation goal for the majority of learners, then one might assume that the field of intelligibility is the contemporary Tower of Babel, where learners of ESL/EFL can speak the way they wish to speak. But this is not true. As a matter of fact, the situation is far from being that simple. Since intelligibility entails not only the speakers, but also the listeners taking part in the communication act (FIELD, 2003), mutual understanding is a crucial key to determine what can be considered intelligible or not. As a consequence, there are many factors which are likely to affect the intelligibility of non-native speakers of English to other non-native speakers and, thereby, either facilitate the interaction or cause communication breakdowns.

### **1.1 Justification**

The area of ELT has been undergoing an important change. As mentioned previously, the adoption of native-speaker norms and models to prepare learners for interactions in international contexts is being questioned and disputed by a growing number of linguists, educators and LA researchers. The reason for this drastic change in pedagogic ideas about



teaching and learning English derives from the fact that the vast majority of interactions in the language nowadays take place in contexts where it is used as a means of communication among numerous non-native speakers across the world. Since the use of English as an international lingua franca is mainly characterized by the predominant involvement of non-native speakers from different language backgrounds (SEIDLHOFER, 2005), it is being increasingly defended that the teaching of the language should therefore be removed from its native speakers' norms and parameters. Albeit all the vigorous debate that has been conducted especially over the last decade, this discussion on ELF teaching does not seem to be shared by the millions teachers worldwide, as stated by Seidlhofer:

“the daily practices of most of the millions teachers of English worldwide seem to remain untouched by this development: very few teachers ‘on the ground’ take part in this meta-level discussion and most classroom language teaching *per se* has changed remarkably little considering how the discourse *about* it has.” (SEIDLHOFER, 2001: 134).

According to this author, ELT targets have remained tied to native-speaker norms due to the dearth of linguistic research on the broadest contemporary use of the language worldwide, namely ELF. This being the case, in spite of the fact that the native English dominance is widely acknowledged as counter-productive, teaching orientations are still largely harnessed to native-speaker parameters for the reason that very little empirical work has hitherto been conducted on the description of ELF. This lack of a descriptive reality precludes the proliferation of lingua franca English on grammars, textbooks, dictionaries and other didactic materials, which are generally regarded as points of reference for these teachers worldwide (SEIDLHOFER, 2001).

In view of this reality, Seidlhofer (2001) proposes to close what she calls “a conceptual gap”, addressing, therefore, the problems in discussing aspects of global English based on native-speaker language use. This type of misconception may lead to a disregard of *lingua franca English* as a variety of the language which is different and independent from *English as a native language* (ENL). Judging ELF aspects on the basis of ENL, then, may give rise to inappropriate assessments of learners' productions. In other words, the “problems” that non-native speakers of English are said to have need to be considered in terms of the perspective through which the language is conceived, i.e. if English is taken as ENL or ELF. Thus, there are several features of ELF which tend to be regarded as errors merely because

they are evaluated on the basis of ENL, irrespective of the fact that they do not lead to any communication problems. In view of that, teaching orientations based on native-speaker norms and models may reveal themselves counter-productive and, thereby, problematic if the main objective of learners is to interact successfully in international contexts: if what they need is only to be able to communicate efficiently with other non-native speakers of English from different L1 backgrounds. Given that the use of English among non-native speakers is continuously growing and that these non-native users are the ones who fill English classrooms across the world, ELF syllabuses seem more appropriate for them than the native-speaker models which are still in force.

The global spread of English has created the adequate conditions to remedy this conflicting situation. Despite that, very little work on lingua franca English has so far been done. According to Seidlhofer (2005), the systematic study of the nature of ELF is necessary for its establishment as a distinct manifestation of the language. The acceptance of the concept of ELF alongside ENL, then, is crucial to get to the bottom of the contradiction which characterizes the teaching and learning of the language today: in spite of the fact that for the vast majority of its users English is a foreign language, there is still a strong tendency to regard its native speakers as the only owners of the language and, thereby, "as custodians over what is acceptable usage" (SEIDLHOFER, 2005: 339). Notwithstanding, empirical work on the linguistic description of ELF has in fact been conducted at the levels of: (1) phonology (Jenkins, 1998); (2) pragmatics (Meierkord, 1996); and (3) lexicogrammar (Seidlhofer, 2004). Nonetheless, there is still an urgent need for more studies aiming at describing and conceptualizing the use of ELF, since the findings in these areas so far "should not be expected to be 'conclusive'" (SEIDLHOFER, 2001: 142).

In relation to the phonological level, whose features play an important role in intelligibility, Jenkins (2000) proposes a model which prioritizes pronunciation features considered essential in terms of mutual understanding for speakers of English as an international language (EIL). This author was, thereby, able to identify in her research phonological aspects which are said to be crucial for mutual understanding when a non-native user of English speaks with another non-native user, and features which are not essential for this kind of interaction. Admittedly, Jenkins' contributions are valuable and relevant, although not definite, as suggested by Cruz (2006), Deterding (2001) and Hewings (2001), who cast doubts on the reliability of her model. This only reinforces the

aforementioned need for more conceptualization and description of ELF, as Jenkins (1998: 121) herself admits: “remarkably little research has been conducted into the intelligibility of English among its non-native speakers from different L1s”. Owing to the dearth of research on the use of English among non-native speakers, this study <sup>focuses on</sup> ~~aims at~~ investigating unintelligible features in ELF speakers’ speech and, therefore, at answering the following two questions:

- (1) At what linguistic levels was there communication breakdown in interactions among six speakers of ELF?
- (2) Are the phonological aspects which impeded the speakers’ intelligibility present in the pronunciation model provided by Jenkins (2000)?

By contrasting the results obtained in this research with Jenkins’ pronunciation model, this work intends to attest the efficiency of her pedagogical proposal in more localized contexts.

## **1.2 Objectives**

The aims which underlie the conduction of this study will be presented in terms of a general objective and of two specific goals.

### **1.2.1 General Objective**

The general objective of this research is to contribute with empirical evidence to the literature on ELF by means of an investigation on the (un)intelligibility of non-native speakers of English.

### **1.2.2 Specific Objectives**

This study has two specific objectives: (1) to identify the linguistic levels at which there were occurrences of communication breakdowns in interactions among six speakers of

ELF; and (2) to verify whether the phonological features which impeded the speakers' intelligibility are present in the pronunciation model provided by Jenkins (2000).

## 2 Methodology

This section will be divided into two subsections, in order to better focus on relevant aspects involving the specific steps and variables considered in this research.

### 2.1 Participants

The group of participants who provided the data which will be analyzed here consists of six non-native speakers of English: three of them being Brazilian, and the other three, French. In spite of the fact that at least three of the participants are from the same mother tongue background, all the interactions selected for the present study required the use of English among them, since only one of the Brazilian participants speaks French, as well as only two of the three French participants speak Portuguese. This being the case, half of the participants cannot speak the first language of the other interlocutors who are from a different mother tongue background. In other words, two of the Brazilian participants cannot speak French and one of the French participants cannot speak Portuguese either. As a result, English was chosen by them as a means of communication, since they would not have been able to interact neither in French nor in Portuguese.

Table 1 briefly presents the participants' background information, obtained through a personal data form (see Appendix).

Table 1: Participants' background information

Participants	Nationality	Age	Sex	Familiarity with the speaker's variety of English
B1	Brazilian	31	M	Familiar with the English spoken by French people
B2	Brazilian	24	M	Not familiar with the French English
B3	Brazilian	25	M	Not familiar with the French English
F1	French	23	F	Familiar with the English spoken by native

				Portuguese speakers
F2	French	23	M	Not familiar with the English variety spoken by Brazilian speakers
F3	French	28	F	Familiar with the English spoken by native speakers of Portuguese

As can be seen in Table 1, six non-native speakers of English took part in the research: half of them are Brazilian and the other half, French. The only two women involved in this study are French; the four remaining participants are men. Their age varies from 23 to 31.

There is only one Brazilian participant who is familiar with the prototype of French English. The other two Brazilian participants had never interacted with French speakers of English. In relation to the French speakers participating in this research, there is one who is not familiar with the Brazilian way of speaking English. The other two French participants had already used English as a means of communication with Brazilian speakers.

## 2.2 Data Collection

The data were collected from February 2007 to February 2009 in the city of Campina Grande, Paraíba. A total of 5 interactions were assembled during these two years.

Table 2 displays the periodicity in which these interactions occurred, specifying: (1) the month and the year when the interaction took place; (2) the duration of the recording; and (3) the participants involved.

Table 2: Periodicity of the interactions

Interaction	Date	Duration	Participants
Interaction 1	February 2007	26'41''	B3 and F3
Interaction 2	March 2007	21'23''	B2, B3 and F3
Interaction 3	December 2008	34'26''	B1, F1 and F2
Interaction 4	January 2009	22'47''	B1, B2, F1 and F2
Interaction 5	February 2009	1:3'46''	B1, B2, F1 and F2

As can be noticed from Table 2, none of the interactions involves all of the six speakers of ELF at the same time. The duration of the recordings ranges approximately from 21 minutes to an hour. The gap between one interaction and another is related to the French participant(s) involved, since the data collection among them occurred as soon as they arrived in Brazil, when these participants were still unable to use Portuguese. This being the case, interactions 1 and 2 took place in the end of February and in the beginning of March, shortly after F3's arrival at the country. Likewise, interactions 3, 4 and 5 occurred during the first three months of participants F1 and F2 in Brazil.

The procedures adopted to collect the data from the speakers of ELF followed four steps. In the first step, interactions among the 6 participants were audio-recorded. After that, during the second stage, the data were examined in order to identify excerpts presenting communication breakdowns. In the third step, informal interviews were conducted with the main objective of obtaining participants' explanations for the communication problems in their interactions. Finally, the last step implicated the data transcription. In addition to these four steps, another procedure was adopted and it involved field notes, which were taken during and after the data collection.

The empirical data were elicited from both natural and semi-natural settings. Therefore, the interactions consisted of: (1) informal conversations, which emerged spontaneously among the participants – interactions 1 and 3; and (2) mini-debates, in which they were asked to give their opinions about polemic themes that had been previously and deliberately selected by the researcher in order to spur discussion among them – interactions 2, 4 and 5. In spite of the fact that the aforementioned themes had been previously chosen by the researcher, the participants did not have the chance to prepare their oral production in advance and only learnt what the topics were at the moment of the interaction. In other words, these mini-debates, similar to the informal conversations themselves, can be said to have occurred spontaneously, albeit the initial encouragement on the part of the researcher of asking questions about specific subject matters. Such spontaneity can be observed in the frequency of pauses and other features, such as interruptions, hesitations, repetitions and self-corrections, which are largely recurrent in informal oral productions, approximating the mini-debates more to the conversational genre than to debates themselves, in terms of conceiving them as a formal method of interactive and representational argument.

Once the phase of audio-recording had been concluded, the data were analyzed so as to identify excerpts presenting communication breakdowns. Since intelligibility involves both the speakers and the listeners taking part in the communication act, mutual understanding is as a crucial key to determine what can be considered intelligible or not. In view of that, such breakdowns were established here through the listeners' reaction. Given that intelligibility is regarded in the present study as the first impression, the analysis focused only on the first reaction of the listeners towards the interlocutors' unintelligible production. This being the case, three types of reaction were identified and taken into account: (1) the listener demonstrating problems in comprehending the interlocutor by using the word *sorry* with a rising tone; (2) the listener repeating the sentence produced by the interlocutor, replacing the unintelligible word for the interrogative pronoun *what*, also with a rising tone; and (3) the listener repeating the unintelligible word either the way he/she understood it or the way it was supposedly produced by the interlocutor.

The fourth step consisted of the detection of the reasons why the speakers' intelligibility was impeded. In order to precisely identify these reasons, interviews were conducted with all the participants. During this stage, answers such as "I don't know", "I have no idea" or "I'm not sure" were widely provided by them to the question "why do you think you were not able to understand him/her?". In view of that, another selection was carried out so that interactions presenting doubts on the real reasons for the participants' lack of understanding were excluded from the corpus. As a consequence, the excerpts selected to compose the corpus of this study consist of those which could either be explained by the participants or those which clearly present communication breakdowns caused by factors regarding the phonological, lexicogrammatical or pragmatic levels. As a consequence, a total of 13 excerpts were established following these criteria.

After the selection of excerpts presenting communication breakdowns, the step that followed comprised the data transcription. All the 13 excerpts were orthographically transcribed, whilst only the crucial words which caused communication problems in each of the selected interactions were phonetically transcribed.

### 3 Theoretical Background

The theoretical background upon which this study is based includes works from two main areas: (1) English as a Lingua Franca; and (2) the teaching of ELF. Relevant aspects discussed in these two areas will be presented in the following sections.

#### 3.1 English as a Lingua Franca

This section will be organized in two subsections, so that significant aspects concerning the use of English as an international lingua franca can be better explored. The subsection *Defining the term*, then, will reflect on the origins and the meaning of ELF, as well as present other terms commonly used in the ELT literature. The subsection *The spread of English around the world* will provide a historical overview of the expansion of English across the globe, focusing on the factors which have made this diffusion possible.

##### 3.1.1 Defining the term

According to Richards & Schmidt (2002: 309), "the term *lingua franca* originated in the Mediterranean region in the Middle Ages among crusaders and traders of different language backgrounds". In other words, the communities living around the eastern coast of the Mediterranean spoke a hybrid language, which combined elements of French, Italian, Spanish, Greek, Turkish and Arabic, in order to carry on the business of trading.

Similar to its use in the eighteenth century, the term *lingua franca* is often employed today to refer to a lingual means of communication used internationally by speakers who do not share either a common native language or a common culture. A lingua franca, then, functions as a *contact language* used by speakers from different L1 backgrounds in order to interact in a wide range of situations, such as business, studies, informal conversations, etc. Nowadays, when people from different mother tongue backgrounds are to communicate, English is vastly chosen as a means of promoting the contact among them. As a consequence, when English is used among non-native speakers, it can be referred to as *English as a lingua franca*. According to House (1999):



“ELF interactions are defined as interactions between members of two or more different linguacultures in English, for none of whom English is the mother tongue.” (HOUSE, 1999, p. 74, *apud* SEIDLHOFER, 2004, p.111).

Since approximately only one out of every four users of English speaks the language as a mother tongue (CRYSTAL, 2008), most ELF interactions take place among non-native speakers. Thus, even though this does not preclude the participation of mother tongue English speakers, one of the most distinctive aspects in the use of ELF is the predominant involvement of non-native users (SEIDLHOFER, 2005).

According to Seidlhofer (2005), ELF is part of the wider phenomenon EIL, which may refer to both localized and globalized uses of English, the difference between one another being that while in localized contexts the language is limited to be used inside national boundaries and with intranational purposes, in globalized contexts it serves as a means for international communication (SEIDLHOFER, 2004). Thus, “(...) the uses of English internationally are not only to be associated with the Expanding Circle but also include speakers of English as a native language in all its dialects” (SEIDLHOFER, 2004: 210).

The spread of English around the world has given rise to the emergence of different varieties of the language and the terms *English as a Lingua Franca* and *English as an International Language*, along with many others, such as *English as a Global Language*, *English as a World Language* and *World English*, are indicators of an increasing interest in these multiple uses of English throughout the globe (LLURDA, 2004). According to Seidlhofer (2005: 339), these terms “have for some time been used as general cover terms for uses of English spanning Inner Circle, Outer Circle and Expanding Circle contexts”<sup>1</sup>. However, when English is used as a means of communication among non-native speakers from different mother tongue backgrounds, the preferred term is ‘English as a lingua Franca’ (SEIDLHOFER, 2001), even though ‘English as an international language’ (JENKINS, 2000) is also used with reference to interactions of this type.

These different uses of English not only reflect the global status it has been achieving more extensively since the 1950s, but also “(...) the way modern society has come to use,

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<sup>1</sup> Kachru (1992) explains the uses of English worldwide in terms of three concentric circles. Thus, the Inner Circle represents the use of English as a native language. The Outer Circle comprises the use of indigenised, nativized or institutionalised varieties of English, i.e. English as a second language. Finally, the Expanding Circle includes the use of English as a foreign language.

and depend on, the English language” (CRYSTAL, 1997: 63). This wide relationship between the English language and the world, however, is the result of a long historical and social process.

### 3.1.2 The spread of English around the world

According to Crystal (1997), the present-day global status of English is attributable to the fact that it has developed a special role which is recognized in every country on the globe, be it as a native language (in USA, Canada, Britain, etc.), as a second language (in India, Singapore, Nigeria, etc.) or as a foreign language (in Brazil, China, Egypt, etc.). This expansion of the English language across the world may be explained by the combination of two main factors: a geographical-historical and a socio-cultural one.

The origins of Global English can be said to date from as far back as the end of the sixteenth century, with the pioneering voyages to the Americas, Asia and the Antipodes. Before this period, the total number of mother tongue English speakers is estimated to have been between 5 and 7 million, nearly all of them living in the British Isles (CRYSTAL, 1997). Due to these expeditions from England to the New World, however, this figure increased almost fiftyfold, to around 250 million. At that time, the majority of English native speakers were no longer living in the British Isles, but overseas. Thereby, it was towards the end of the sixteenth century that a significant step took place “in the progress of English towards its status as a Global Language” (CRYSTAL, 1997: 25).

The expansion of English promoted by the expeditions to the New World continued with the British colonial developments in Africa and South Pacific, which peaked towards the end of the nineteenth century. It follows that the facts described in both of these periods constitute the aforementioned geographical-historical factor, given that it explains how English started expanding all over the world in terms of past events and physical dimensions. However, tracing the origins of the English language movement does not fully explain its present-day world status, although it helps understanding how the language started penetrating in different parts of the globe. In other words, this factor does not make it clear how the language *continues* to hold its international position.

According to Crystal (1997: 7), “a language becomes an international language for one chief reason: the political power of its people – especially their military power”.

However, as the author points out, language dominance is not exclusively the result of military power. Undoubtedly, this kind of power plays a decisive role in establishing a language internationally, but it takes more than armed forces to *maintain* and *expand* such a language. These latter tasks can only be attained with the assistance of economic and cultural factors. Thus, the maintenance of English in its present-day position is attributable to the broad strength of the United States in the economic and cultural spheres all over the world, not counting their political leadership and technological domination.

In short, the international position which the English language holds in the contemporary world is mainly the result of these two factors:

“the expansion of British colonial power, which peaked towards the end of the nineteenth century, and the emergence of the United States as the leading economic power of the twentieth century.” (CRYSTAL, 1997: 53).

### **3.2 The teaching of English as a lingua franca**

The teaching of ELF focuses on three main levels, which are regarded as essential to guaranteeing an efficient communication among non-native speakers: (1) the phonology; (2) the lexicogrammar; and (3) the pragmatics. Due to the lack of data presenting communication breakdown at the pragmatic level, only the levels of phonology and lexicogrammar will be taken into account. This being the case, the following two subsections will concentrate on the teaching of ELF concerning pronunciation and uses of lexis and grammar.

#### **3.2.1 The Phonology of ELF**

Since some scholars, such as Jenkins (2000), Seidlhofer (2001) and Crystal (2008), argue that a native-like accent should no longer be the ultimate objective in preparing learners for interactions in ELF contexts, the teaching of pronunciation has started to undergo dramatic changes. Concerning these changes, the intelligibility emerges as an imperative aspect to be considered.

The term “intelligibility” was first employed with reference to second language performance in 1949 by Abercrombie, who argued that, apart from intending secret agents and intending teachers, “learners need no more than a comfortably intelligible pronunciation” (ABERCROMBIE, 1956, p. 37). According to Field (2003), it was only in the 1970s, however, that this concept started being more widely discussed by pronunciation teachers, who began to reconsider their priorities in language teaching and to establish more realistic goals for learners to achieve. This being the case, a considerable number of pronunciation teachers at that time started asking questions whether the goals in force were practical or not. They unsurprisingly came to the conclusion that it was unrealistic to expect learners to acquire an accent that resembled that of a native-speaker. In other words, teachers started realizing that their aim should be a pronunciation that could be effortlessly understood by other users of the language: an intelligible pronunciation (FIELD, 2003).

According to Field (2003:35), intelligibility, unlike comprehensibility or interpretability, can be defined as “the extent to which the content of the message is recognizable”. Still in relation to this notion, the author states that it “depends very much on the listener as well as the speaker” (FIELD, 2003: 37). The recognition of any content, then, involves not only the production by the speaker but also the decoding of such a production by the listener. Due to its subjective nature, measuring the intelligibility of both speakers and listeners is admittedly difficult, since it implicates a considerable number of linguistic and extra-linguistic variables which are likely to affect it.

Concerning the speaker’s intelligibility, Field (2003) lists factors which are likely to have an effect on it: (1) the speaker’s phonological representations; (2) the influence of L1 on the speaker’s phonological categories; (3) the speaker’s articulatory command of L2 phonology; and (4) possible effects of accommodation – when the speaker’s L1 shares features with the listener’s or when the speaker makes allowance for the listener’s limited knowledge of L1. The listener factors, according to him, are: (1) the listener’s phonological representations; (2) the influence of L1 on the listener’s phonological categories; (3) the listener’s familiarity with the speaker’s variety; (4) the extent to which the listener’s L1 approximates to the speaker’s; (5) level of the listener’s L2 knowledge compared with that of the speaker; and (6) the listener’s phonological working memory.

Out of the variables mentioned by Field (2003), the third listener factor, namely the listener’s familiarity with the speaker’s variety, is relevant to the present study, since, as

mentioned in Table 1, there are 3 participants who are familiar with the interlocutors' variety: one of the Brazilian participants is familiar with the French English and two of the French speakers are familiar with the way Brazilians speak English. Comments about the effect of such a familiarity on the speakers' intelligibility are made in the Analysis (see p. 22).

In the field of pronunciation, which is mainly associated with the speaker, there are valuable contributions from researchers such as Seidlhofer (2001) and Jenkins (2000). The latter author carried out a research on EIL which aimed at investigating pronunciation features which are crucial for mutual understanding when a non-native user of English interacts with other non-native users, in addition to aspects which are not important. Based on the results obtained from this research, Jenkins (2000) proposes a phonological model called *Lingua Franca Core* (LFC), which consists of a set of pronunciation features that are considered essential to the phonological intelligibility of speakers of EIL. These features, designated 'core', were established on the basis of the two most prevailing native varieties of English and so they comprise phonological aspects present in either RP or GA. Thus, the pronunciation features included in the LFC require from non-native users the approximation of the RP and GA sounds. On the other hand, features which did not lead to any intelligibility problems are regarded as 'non-core'. It follows that divergences from native-speaker realizations concerning 'non-core' aspects are considered instances of acceptable L2 regional variation.

According to Jenkins (2000), the aspects which are crucial to international intelligibility should be emphasized in the teaching of pronunciation, whereas the features which were proven not to hinder intelligibility should be excluded from the syllabus. Jenkins' findings present an interesting trend: the production of sounds that are commonly referred to as "typically English", namely the 'th' sounds /θ/ and /ð/, is non-essential for mutual understanding among speakers of EIL. In short, the aspects included in the LFC are: (1) consonants (except for the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/); (2) consonant cluster; (3) vowel quantity and diphthongs; and (4) nuclear stress. The aspects which are unessential to intelligibility and, thereby, excluded from the LFC consist of: (1) weak forms; (2) stress; and (3) pitch movement (essentially rising and falling tones).

The pronunciation model proposed by Jenkins (2000) is said to be more appropriate “for classes aiming to prepare learners for interactions in EIL contexts (...)” (JENKINS, 1998: 119).

### 3.2.2 The Lexicogrammar of ELF

According to Seidlhofer (2004: 219), lexicogrammar of ELF “constitutes the area in which (...) the smallest amount of description has been undertaken to date”. One of the reasons for the dearth of findings on such a level may be derived from the necessity of an extremely large corpus in order to arrive at reliable results. In fact, the need for description of ELF at the level of lexicogrammar led to a research initiative which aimed at the compilation of a sizeable corpus comprising the use of ELF by speakers from a wide range of mother tongue backgrounds. Carried out at the University of Vienna under Seidlhofer’s direction, the compilation of this corpus is referred to as the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE)<sup>2</sup>.

The data captured in VOICE is essentially spoken ELF, produced in face-to-face interactions among fairly fluent speakers from a variety of first language backgrounds. The recorded and transcribed interactions consist of speech events which range over a diversity of settings, functions and participants’ roles and relationships. The overall objective of VOICE is to find out “what salient common features of ELF use (...) emerge, irrespective of speakers’ first languages and levels of L2 proficiency” (SEIDLHOFER, op. cit., p. 219). Although no reliable findings on quantitative investigation has been reported so far, the use of ELF among non-native speakers presents some regularities in both lexical and grammatical uses, which are usually regarded as “errors”, even though they do not lead to any misunderstandings or communication breakdowns.

According to Seidlhofer (2004), the initial findings on these aspects involve: (1) dropping the third person present tense *-s*; (2) confusing the relative pronouns *who* and *which*; (3) omitting definite and indefinite articles where they are obligatory in ENL, and inserting them where they do not occur in ENL; (4) failing to use correct forms in tag questions; (5) inserting redundant prepositions; (6) overusing certain verbs of high semantic

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<sup>2</sup> The website of VOICE is [https://www.univie.ac.at/voice/page/corpus\\_availability](https://www.univie.ac.at/voice/page/corpus_availability).

generality (such as *do* and *have*); (7) replacing infinitive-constructions with *that*-clauses; and (8) overdoing explicitness.

Parallel to Jenkins' findings in phonology, Seidlhofer (2001: 149) observes that "it is features which are regarded as 'the most typically English', such as third person *-s*, tags, phrasal verbs and idioms, which turn out to be non-essential for mutual understanding".

#### 4 Analysis

In order to satisfactorily answer the research questions formulated in the Introduction (p. 10), the data will be analyzed in two different sections. The first section will focus on the linguistic levels at which there were communication breakdowns, whereas the second one will bring the contrast of the results obtained here with the phonological model proposed by Jenkins (2000).

##### 4.1 Linguistic levels with communication breakdowns

The aspects which impeded the speakers' intelligibility occurred at two linguistic levels: (1) the lexicogrammatical; and (2) the phonological. There is no occurrence of communication breakdown at the pragmatic level. The participants are indicated as: B1, B2, B3 = Brazilian speakers of ELF; and F1, F2, F3 = French speakers of ELF. The data were transcribed according to the rules established by the "Projeto de Estudo Coordenado da Norma Urbana Lingüística Culta" (Projeto NURC), as presented by Dionísio (2001)<sup>3</sup>. In addition to the symbols presented by this author, others, which are not included in her proposal, were used<sup>4</sup>.

Each excerpt with communication breakdown will be preceded by a short description, which will provide: the indication of the speaker who produced the unintelligible utterance; the crucial word as found in ENL; the phonetic transcription of the problematic utterance as produced by the speaker; and the effect of such a production on the listener.

<sup>3</sup> The symbols used in the analysis are: ... (pauses); : (extension of sounds); CAPITALIZED LETTERS (emphasis); and ? (interrogation).

<sup>4</sup> The additional symbols are: /.../ (splits in the speech); and [ ] (completion of ideas expressed in previous speeches).

With regard to the excerpts, they were extracted from the data so as to contain both the unintelligible word and the listener's reaction, as specified in the Methodology (p. 14).

#### 4.1.1 The level of lexicogrammar

This section gathers aspects related to grammar or lexis which impeded the speakers' intelligibility. There are four occurrences of communication breakdown due to deviation<sup>5</sup> in grammatical and lexical uses. Each of the four excerpts will be followed by comments on the type of deviation.

1 F1: *hard* or *difficult* produced as [dɪfɪ 'si:t] (B2 only understands the word when F1 substitutes it for *hard*.)

F1: it's very [dɪfɪ 'si:t] to learn a language.

B2: it's very what? ↘

F1: [dɪfɪ]/.../ *hard*...

The production of [dɪfɪ 'si:t] by F1 reveals a clear influence of L1 on the speaker's linguistic categories. In spite of the fact that the French word *difficile* is cognate of *difícil* in Portuguese, B2 was not able to understand it. The participants F2, a native speaker of French, and B1, who is familiar with the French English, on the contrary, had no difficulties in understanding [dɪfɪ 'si:t] produced by F1. The lack of familiarity with the prototype of French English, then, may explain the reason why the Brazilian participant failed to comprehend his French interlocutor. Therefore, the deviant use of lexis by F1 in conjunction with B2's lack of familiarity with the French English is likely to explain the communication problem between these two speakers. This can be perceived in B2's explanation for his lack of understanding:

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<sup>5</sup> The term *deviation* is used here with reference to divergences from ENL which led to communication breakdowns.



B2: "listening to it [dɪfɪ ' si:t] again now, I can understand [the word], you know, but when she said it, I just thought/.../ I don't know... I thought she meant something was ill, seal, or something... I had no idea that *difficil* was almost the same in French..."

2 F1: *translation* or *subtitles* produced as [tra ' du:ʃɔ̃n] (B2 only understands the word when F1 adds *legend*)

F1: in France... the... all... erm... the movies get a [tra ' du:ʃɔ̃n]

B2: get a what ↗?

F1: a [tra ' du:ʃn]... erm... legend...

B2: oh...

B2's lack of understanding towards the production of [tra ' du:ʃɔ̃n] by F1 may be explained by the same reasons identified in the previous interaction. This being the case, the communication problem here is likely to have been caused by the speaker's deviation in lexis along with the listener's lack of familiarity with the way French speak English. In other words, the influence of the French language on F1's lexical categories led this speaker to use [tra ' du:ʃɔ̃n] in lieu of "translation" or "subtitle". Yet again, participants F2 and B1 demonstrated no difficulties in understanding the deviant word. B2, on the other hand, failed to comprehend his interlocutor once more. For this reason, the communication breakdown between F1 and B2 can be explained on the basis of the two mentioned variables: the speaker's deviant lexis use together with the listener's lack of familiarity with the prototype of French English. In spite of the fact that B2 was not able to explain his miscomprehension, it is possible to come to such a conclusion given that the participants involved in this interaction are the same as in the prior case.

3 B3: *period* used in the place of *term* (F3 only understands *period* produced by B3 when the word *university* is added.).

B3: we are just waiting for the... period to end...

F3: period...? Whos/.../ What period↗?

B3: you know, in university...

F3: oh yeah... yeah...

The use of *period* by B3 could only be understood by F3 once the Brazilian speaker added the word *university*. Since intelligibility is conceived here as the listener's first impression, it is possible to state that there was indeed a communication breakdown in such an interaction between B3 and F3. The influence of L1 on B3's linguistic categories may have led the Brazilian participant to use the English word *period* in the same way as the word *período* is used in Portuguese, with reference to the academic term. In spite of F3's familiarity with the prototype of Brazilian English, the French listener could only understand the crucial word when *university* was added. Thus, it follows that the use of *period* by itself did not convey the meaning expected by B3. The excerpt below was extracted from the interview with F3 and it confirms how her understanding of *period* was facilitated by an additional word, namely *university*:

F3: "I don't know [why I was not able to understand *period* at first]... I was kind of waiting for an explanation, you know... what period, you know?... when he said *in university*, I just made the connection... oh, period in university..."

4 F1: the use of the apostrophe + s to indicate relation of ownership between the words *back* and *theater* (B1 only understands F1's question when it is rephrased by B2, who used the preposition *of* instead of 's.).

F1: you like the... theater's back?

B1: I like if the theater's BA:ck?

F1: yes...

B1: what ↗?

B2: do you like watching films in the BACK of the theater, too?

B1: oh... no, no... I like sitting in the front row better...

This sample containing communication breakdown due to deviation from ENL grammar use can be explained by the inappropriate employment of the genitive case with the apostrophe + s ('s) to indicate relation of ownership between the words *back* and *theater*, which are inanimate beings and so require the use of the preposition *of*. B1's reply to F1's question "you like the theater's back?" shows that he interpreted the word *back* as an adverb, rather than as a noun: *I like if the theater's back?*. This interpretation can be confirmed in B1's own words:

B1: "I think/.../ I... I thought she was... asking me if I liked the fact that the theater's back/.../ like 'I'll be back', you know..."

Comments on the lack of relation between the analysis and the theoretical background.

#### 4.1.2 The level of phonology

There are 9 excerpts presenting phonological aspects which impeded the speakers' intelligibility. According to the nature of these aspects, the excerpts were distributed in 4 categories: (1) consonants; (2) vowels; (3) diphthongs; and (4) consonants and vowels.

##### CONSONANTS

The type of deviation in the category *consonants* consists of the deletion of the alveolar consonant /t/ in the words *spirit* and *what*, produced respectively by F2 and B2 as [spɪɹɪ] and [wɔ].

5 F2: *spirit* pronounced as [spɪɹɪ] (B2 only understands what F2 says when the word is repeated with the production of the consonant sound /t/).

F2: the [spɪɹɪ] of people here...

B2: the what? ?

F2: the [spɪɹɪt] of people here...

One of the most distinctive aspects regarding the relation between pronunciation and spelling in the French language refers to the deletion of several word-final written consonants in speech. The word *esprit* ("spirit"), for instance, is pronounced as /ɛsprɪ/ in French (GALVEZ, 2005), without the production of the /t/ sound. The influence of L1 on F2's phonological categories, then, may have led this French speaker to pronounce the word *spirit* according to the rule of *final consonant deletion* (cf. CASAGRANDE, 1984), which relates to a common process in the phonology of the French language. As a result, the French participant failed to pronounce the final consonant sound /t/ in the word *spirit*. The production [spɪrɪ] made B2 believe that his French interlocutor was using a word which was not part of his vocabulary:

B2: "i/.../ I couldn't understand becau::se I thought I... didn't know the word..."

6 B2: *what* produced as [wɔ] (F1 mistakes the word for *why*.)

B2: [wɔ] is necessary to learn a language?

F1: WHY ↗?

B2: [wɔt]...

With respect to the word *what*, produced by B2 as [wɔ], the participant himself explained the omission of the alveolar consonant sound /t/:

B2: "I think I was trying to... SWALLOW the t as they do in Britain, you know... maybe I swallowed it too much..."

Technically speaking, by "swallow", B2 means that he tried to "glottalize" the alveolar consonant (cf. WELLS, 1982). However, instead of producing a glottal stop, the participant merely omitted the /t/ sound in *what*. Thus, the communication problem between B2 and F1 may have been caused by B2's unsuccessful attempt to glottalize the voiceless consonant. The deletion of such a consonant, then, led F1 to interpret the word *what* as *why*.

## VOWELS

There are two occurrences of communication breakdown in the category *vowels*. The types of deviation produced by the participants regarding this category refer to: (1) the substitution of /ɜ:/ for /ɔ:/ in the word *working*; and (2) the deletion of the vowel sound /ɪ/ in the word *reactions*.

7 F1: *working* pronounced as [wɔ:kɪŋ] (B1 only understands when F1 repeats the word substituting the open-mid back rounded vowel /ɔ:/ for the close-mid back rounded vowel /o/.).

F1: what do you mean, for you it's [wɔ:kɪŋ]?

(B1 demonstrates lack of understanding through facial expressions)

F1: what do you mean, for you it's [wo:kɪŋ]?

B1: I think it's working because people... people actually do it...

The type of deviation in *working*, conspicuously the replacement of the open-mid central unrounded vowel /ɜ:/ for the open-mid back rounded vowel /ɔ:/, created another known word to B1 (*walking*). Thus, the communication breakdown in this excerpt is likely to have been caused due to the oddity produced by the word which was created as a result of the replacement of /ɜ:/ for /ɔ:/. It can be perceived, then, that B1 based his interpretation of the crucial word on the acoustic information provided by F1 and consequently understood it as "walking", instead of as "working". This can be confirmed in the following passage from the interview with B1:

B1: the first thin/.../ the first thing that went through my mind, I think, was "WHO'S talking about WALKING?"...

8 F1: *reactions* produced as [ˈɪɛkʃəns] (B1 understands the first production of the word as *erections*.).

F1: Two [ɹɛkʃəns] different...

B1: eRECTIONS ↗?

F1: No, [ɹɛkʃəns]...

Regarding this second case of deviation from GA and RP sounds, it follows that the deletion of the vowel sound /ɪ/ in the word *reactions* once more led B1 to interpret the word on the basis of the acoustic information. In spite of the fact that the realization of *reactions* as [ɹɛkʃəns] does not imply any existing word in English, the listener related such a production to a word whose phonological representation resembled that of [ɹɛkʃəns], as produced by F1. Therefore, this may explain why [ɹɛkʃəns] was interpreted by B1 as *erections*.

#### DIPHTHONGS

In relation to the deviations produced by the participants concerning the pronunciation of *diphthongs*, all the three excerpts found in this category refer to the deletion of a vocalic segment, resulting, as a consequence, in the production of pure vowels.

9 F1: *identity* produced as [i:ˈdɛntɪɪ] (B2 only understands the word when B1 repeats it producing the diphthong /aɪ/).

F1: it's a question of [i:ˈdɛntɪɪ]

B2: of what ↗?

B1: [,aɪˈdɛntɪɪ]

B2: yeah, yeah...

In spite of the fact that both French and Portuguese lack the diphthongal offglides typically heard with English single vowels, i.e. all vowels in these Romance languages are

pure, both of them present in their phonological system diphthongal realizations, which are represented in orthography by two vowels, one of them being considered a semivowel. This being the case, the production of *identity* as [i:'dɛntɪtɪ] may have been caused by the influence of L1 on the speaker's linguistic categories, given that single vowels in written French are always pronounced as pure sounds. As a consequence of such a deletion, the Brazilian participant B2, whose phonological representation of the word *identity* involves the diphthong /aɪ/, was not able to understand [i:'dɛntɪtɪ], produced by F1 with the omission of the vowel sound /a/ from the diphthong. This can be perceived in the following excerpt from the interview with B2:

B2: "I have no idea [why I was not able to understand *identity* produced by the interlocutor without the diphthong]... I guess I just thought it was weird/.../ i[i:]dentity, you know..."

10 F1: *hope* produced as [hɒp] (B1 only comprehends the word containing deviation when F1 repeats it for the third time.).

F1: I think education is a [hɒp].

B1: is a what ↗?

F1: is a [hɒp]...

B1: a [hɒp] ↗?

F1: yeah, for me education is a [hɒp].

Since the production *hope* as [hɒp] involves the same French speaker from the prior interaction, the communication breakdown between F1 and B1 is likely to have occurred as a result of the same type of influence which led this speaker to delete a segmental in the diphthong /aɪ/ from the previous case. Hence, the influence of the French language on F1's linguistic categories once more induced her to delete a segmental from the diphthong, which, in this case, consists of the semivowel sound /ʊ/ from the diphthong /oʊ/. As a

result, B1 understood the crucial word as *hop*, which made no sense in the context of the interaction and, for that reason, hindered communicative success between them:

B1: "she repeated [the word *hope*] THREE times and I couldn't understand it/.../ but did you hear it? DID you? She said... *hop* [hop], like JUMP, I don't know..."

11 B2: *gay* produced as [geɪ] (B1 only understands B2 when the word is pronounced with the diphthong /eɪ/, followed by the synonym *homosexual*).

B2: the other theme I was going to ask your opinion about is the [geɪ] marriage.

B1: what? ?

B2: [geɪ] marriage, homosexual marriage...

The production of *gay* as [geɪ], which led B1 to misunderstand his interlocutor, need to be considered through a different perspective, given that the diphthong /eɪ/ in the word *gay* is orthographically represented by two letters and that such a word is lexicalized in Portuguese. Moreover, the pronunciation of *gay* in Portuguese also involves the diphthong. As a matter of fact, unlike F1 who repeated the word *hope* three times as [hop], B2 corrected himself as soon as his interlocutor demonstrated miscomprehension. Therefore, the production of [geɪ] by B2 may have been merely the result of fast speech. Conversely, what is more important than the reasons which led B2 to produce *gay* as [geɪ] is the fact that the deletion of a segmental from the diphthong revealed intelligibility problems between the participants, since B1's first reaction towards the crucial word reveals that he was not able to understand it.

#### VOWELS AND CONSONANTS

This last category, *vowels and consonants*, contains two occurrences of communication breakdown.



12 B1: *could* produced as [k=ud] (B2 understands the first production of the word as *good*.).

B1: I believe it [k=ud] work.

B2: good work? you believe it what ↗?

B1: it [k=ud] work...

This excerpt presents the word *could* produced as [k=ud]. Such a production contains two types of deviation: (1) the substitution of the half-close back rounded vowel /ʊ/ for the close back rounded vowel /u:/; (2) and the lack of aspiration of the voiceless velar plosive /k/. The substitution of /ʊ/ for /u:/ shows that B1 was not able to contrast the lengths in these vowels, an inability which may be derived from the fact that this contrast between long and short vowels is inexistent in Portuguese. In addition to this aspect, B1 also failed to aspirate the fortis /k/ in *could*. Given that the plosives /p/, /t/ and /k/ are not aspirated in Portuguese, B1's pronunciation of *could* may have been influenced by the way these consonant sounds are produced in his mother tongue. In short, the lack of aspiration and the inability of distinguishing between long and short vowels constitute deviations from ENL sounds which may have been caused by the influence of Portuguese on the speaker's linguistic categories. Thus, the combination of these two deviations led the Brazilian listener B2 to take the crucial word as *good*, in spite of the grammatical oddity that such an interpretation would implicate and his awareness of it:

B2: "it sounded weird [I believe it good work], but I heard him say *GOOD*, you know, with g..."

13 B1: *miss here* produced as [mi:SIə] (F1 only comprehends B1 when he pronounces the two words slowly, adding the word *Brazil*.).

B1: will you [mi:SIə]?

(F1 demonstrates miscomprehension through facial expressions and shoulder movements)

B1: will you [mishɪə], Brazil?

F2: yeah... sure...

(F1 nods)

With regard to the production of *miss here*, it follows that B1 substituted the half-close front unrounded vowel /ɪ/ for the close front unrounded vowel /i:/ in the word *miss* and omitted the voiceless glottal fricative /h/ in the word *here*. It can be perceived that the Brazilian speaker failed again to maintain the appropriate length of the vowel sound found in the word *miss*. Instead of using the short vowel /ɪ/, B1 pronounced the crucial word with the long vowel /i:/. This type of deviation parallels with the substitution of /ʊ/ for /u:/, analyzed in the previous excerpt. Thus, the replacement of /ɪ/ for /i:/ confirms B1's inability of contrasting between long and short vowels. Since vowel quantity refers to a phonological aspect which does not apply to Portuguese, such an inability may be derived from an influence of L1.

The Brazilian participant also failed to produce the glottal fricative /h/ in the word *here*, which is generally represented in orthography by the letter 'h'. Since this letter is mute in CV environments in Portuguese, there may have been again an influence of L1 on the speaker's linguistic categories, which led him to omit the /h/ sound. Consequently, neither F1 nor F2 were able to infer any interpretation to [mi:ɪə]. According to one of the French listeners, the utterance was beyond her understanding:

F1: "it was just... in::compre:hensible..."

## 4.2 Contrast with LFC

The factors which impeded the intelligibility of the participants at the level of phonology are included in four categories: (1) consonants; (2) vowels; (3) diphthongs; and (4) consonants and vowels.

According to Jenkins (2000), all consonants are essential for intelligible pronunciation except for the dental fricative sounds /θ/ and /ð/. Thus, deviations from British/American English pronunciation in relation to the production of most consonant sounds may hinder communicative success when a non-native speaker of English interacts with other non-native speakers. Accordingly, the omission of the alveolar consonant sound /t/ in the words *spirit* and *what*, produced by F2 and B2 respectively, impeded the speakers' intelligibility. This type of deviation identified in the present research, then, parallels with Jenkins' attestation that consonants are important for intelligible pronunciation.

With regard to vowels, Jenkins (2000) points out that vowel length distinctions, i.e. the contrast between long and short vowel sounds, are important for the phonological intelligibility in EIL interactions. An interesting example found in the data presenting communication breakdown in relation to vowels is the substitution of the open-mid central unrounded vowel /ɜː/ for the open-mid back rounded vowel /ɔː/ in the word *working*. Evidently, the replacement of /ɜː/ for /ɔː/ does not correspond to the distinction between long and short vowels highlighted by Jenkins (2000). Instead, the referred substitution of phonemes consists of a deviation regarding vowel quality, which is an aspect excluded from LFC.

According to Richards & Schmidt (2002), vowel quality refers to the features which distinguish one vowel sound from another, as determined by the position of the tongue and lips. Thus, in relation to foreign language performance, it comprises the use of a different quality in the production of the target phoneme. In Jenkins' words, vowel quality regards "the difference between vowel sounds where length is not involved" (JENKINS, 2002: 2), e.g. the pronunciation of /e/ as /æ/. According to the author, such an aspect is not essential for intelligibility in EIL interactions, given that vowel quality is not stable even across native varieties of English. However, the substitution of the sound /ɜː/ for another vowel sound is

regarded as an exception in her work, since it proved to cause communication problems in a number of interactions investigated by the author. As a result, the author made an exception in the LFC (Jenkins, 2000: 146), and included vowel quality regarding the sound /ɜː/. The intelligibility problems caused by the substitution of /ɜː/ for another vowel sound in Jenkins' research occurred due to the creation of another known word. One of the examples mentioned by the author is the pronunciation of 'curtain' as 'carton', with the substitution of /ɜː/ for /ɑː/. Accordingly, the replacement of /ɜː/ for /ɔː/ in the word *working* by F1 created another known word (walking), and this led to an intelligibility problem between F1 and B1. In short, the type of deviation produced by the French participant in this research is rightfully included in LFC.

The other type of deviation in the category *vowels* refers to the deletion of the vowel sound /ɪ/ in the word *reactions*. Although this type of error is not directly addressed by the author, it is possible to assert its inclusion in the LFC, owing to the prominence given to the production of vowel sounds and to the avoidance of incorrect deletions.

Concerning diphthongs, Jenkins' pedagogical proposal takes them into account, since her findings showed their importance for intelligibility, with special regard to /aʊ/, /aɪ/ and /ɔɪ/, which "are common to all NS varieties" (JENKINS, 2000: 145) and, therefore, significant for general intelligibility. As for the other diphthongs, the author states that it is length rather than quality which is most important for intelligibility, since many native accents of English present different realizations of the same diphthong in relation to quality, eg. the word 'cake', which is pronounced as /kɑɪk/ in South London but as /keɪk/ in RP (JENKINS, 2000). The three samples of interactions containing deviant pronunciation of diphthongs reveal that they are in fact essential for an effective communication among ELF speakers. However, rather than applying L1 qualities to the diphthongal realizations, the participants who had communication problems regarding this category deleted either the vowel or the semivowel sound. Thus, the deletion of a segmental in the diphthongs of the words *hope*, *identity* and *gay* proved to cause communication problems among the participants involved in this research. The results obtained here, then, confirm Jenkins' evidence on the importance of diphthongs for the phonological intelligibility in international settings.

The last category comprises communication breakdowns due to deviations in both vowels and consonants. The production of *could* as [k=ud] by B2 reveals two types of deviation: the lack of aspiration of the voiceless velar plosive /k/ and the substitution of the half-close back rounded vowel /ʊ/ for the close back rounded vowel /u:/. Concerning the fortis plosives /p/, /t/ and /k/ in word-initial position, Jenkins (2000) considers the aspiration of these consonants important. Thus, the lack of aspiration of /k/ by B1 may have contributed to the communication problem captured between B1 and B2, since the listener understood *could* as *good*. The substitution of /ʊ/ for /u:/ by B1 demonstrates his inability of contrasting long and short vowels, which is an aspect regarded as essential for intelligibility in ELF contexts. Therefore, the production of [k=ud] presents deviations from two relevant pronunciation features, namely lack of aspiration and vowel quantity. Such a combination consequently resulted in communication breakdown.

Comparable to the production of [k=ud], analyzed in the previous paragraph, the pronunciation of *miss here* as [mi:SIə] presents deviations from two phonological features which are considered essential by Jenkins (2000): (1) the inaccurate distinction of vowel length, namely short /ɪ/ and long /i:/; and (2) the deletion of the consonant sound /h/.

In conclusion, it is possible to perceive that all the phonological aspects analyzed in the previous subsection are present in Jenkins' pedagogical proposal. This being the case, the results obtained here corroborate LFC, given that they are in accordance with the phonological features included in Jenkins' model.

## 5 Final considerations

The results obtained from the analysis of the data make it possible to answer the research questions formulated in the Introduction (p. 10): at what linguistic levels was there communication breakdown in interactions among six speakers of ELF?; and (2) are the phonological aspects which impeded the speakers' intelligibility present in the pronunciation model provided by Jenkins (2000)?.

The 13 excerpts presenting communication problems among the participants are concentrated at two linguistic levels: the lexicogrammar, with 4 occurrences, and the phonology, with a slightly higher number of incidences, totalizing 9 occurrences. No data have been found at the pragmatic level. This lack of occurrences at the level of pragmatics may be the result of the participants' cooperation and mutual support, attitudes which characterize ELF interactions in general, as pointed out by Seidlhofer (2004). Two other reasons which might explain the lack of factors at the pragmatic level may be: (1) the relatively small size of the corpus; and (2) the premise that violations of ENL pragmatic norms are not likely to cause communication problems in ELF interactions (SEIDLHOFER, 2004).

Contrasting the 4 occurrences at the lexicogrammatical level with the 9 samples at the phonological one, it can be perceived that grammar and lexis had less influence on the unintelligibility of the ELF speakers involved in the study. Actually, there was only one excerpt presenting communication problems which was derived from the violation of grammar rules. As a matter of fact, some grammatical oddities produced by the participants did not lead to any misunderstandings at all. An interesting example of that is the sentence "a country who are ready", produced by F1 with the "inappropriate" use of both the relative pronoun *who* and the verb *are* in relation to the noun *country*. Due to the specific objectives envisaged in the present study, these data were not included in the transcribed corpus. However, they are being mentioned here now in order to point out the fact that some aspects which are usually emphasized in the teaching of English and considered in urgent need of correction do not present much relevance to communicative success. The sentence "a country who are ready", in fact, was not even perceived as an odd construction by the other speakers involved in the interaction. This being the case, the use of "inappropriate"

relative pronouns demonstrated to be less important than the deviant use of the genitive case ('s), for instance, which led to communication problems between F1 and B1.

The phonological level presented a slightly higher number of communication breakdowns. In spite of the fact that intelligibility is being defended as a more appropriate pronunciation target for learners of ESL/ EFL to achieve than a native-like performance, certain phonological aspects regarding ENL need to be emphasized in the teaching of pronunciation so as to guarantee an efficient communication among speakers of ELF. Some of these aspects involve the production of consonant sounds (as in the cases where the /t/ sound was omitted in the words *what* and *spirit*, resulting in communication problems), and diphthongs (since all the examples presenting the omission of a segmental in diphthongs led to misunderstandings among the participants), to mention only some of these aspects.

As an answer to the second research question, "are the phonological aspects which impeded the speakers' intelligibility present in the pronunciation model provided by Jenkins?", it is possible to state that all the factors identified in the analysis refer to those included in the LFC, since there were no occurrences of communication breakdowns involving stress, pitch movement, weak forms or any other aspects that are excluded from such a pronunciation model.

Excerpts 1 and 2, with communication problems caused by the influence of French on the speaker's L2 production, showed that the listener's lack of familiarity with the prototype of French English played an important role for the unintelligibility of the speaker. Two other participants who are familiar with the way the French speak English had no difficulties in understanding the interlocutor. Hence, a suggestion for future research is investigating the intelligibility of speakers of ELF from a wider range of first language backgrounds, since the present study had limitations regarding the diversity of the participants' mother tongues, which involved only Portuguese and French. Granted such a variety of participants' L1 backgrounds, it would be possible to analyze the relation between intelligibility and variables such as the listener's familiarity with a given variety of English and the effects elicited by an approximation of the listener's L1 to the speaker's.

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## APPENDIX

PERSONAL DATA FORM

Name (soubriquet):	
Nationality:	
Age:	
Education:	

Have you ever spoken English with...

- a) Brazilian people?
  
- b) French people?

.....  
PERSONAL DATA FORM

Name (soubriquet):	
Nationality:	
Age:	
Education:	

Have you ever spoken English with...

- a) Brazilian people?
  
- b) French people?