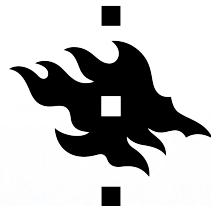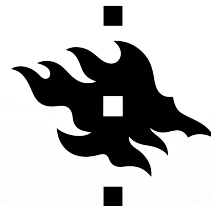# ELF AND CHANGE

ANNA MAURANEN

ELF PHD CONFERENCE

SOUTHAMPTON UNIVERITY 24 JUNE 2016

UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

THE MOBILE GLOBAL WORLD

- The rich world: business, academia, entertainment
- The poor world: emigration, immigration, asylum seeking
- Digital communication devices in everyone's pocket

    -> mobility and mobile communication permeates our lives

    -> Language mixing, multilingual practices

- Nation states questioned – and fiercely defended

    -> the awareness and the debates have (finally) reached linguistics

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LANGUAGE RESPONDS TO CHANGE

- Periods of rapid social change and large-scale mobility have been associated with accelerated language change in the past.

- Both conditions fulfilled and relevant to the study of ELF.

- But we really do not know very much about the reality of language change in the age of superdiversity.

- In particular, we do not know much about how linguistic structures or elements are changing in a situation where communication is global

  and several relevant communities are present for anyone at any given time.

- ELF is a great point of entry to global language flows.

- Largely because it is complex and dynamic? (cf. ALL ELF 9 plenary abstracts!)

- Or because it is the global contact language?

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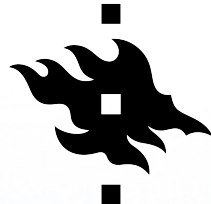
WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM ELF?

Assuming ELF to be a complex, higher-order form of language contact between similects, what is it that we can reasonably expect to find when we delve into an ELF database?

A fair amount of evidence on different aspects of ELF exists. Most research has been carried out with small samples of data, but not all,

and when different studies come up with similar findings, even small-scale research shows its usefulness.

But what are reasonable predictions on ELF based on research other than ELF?

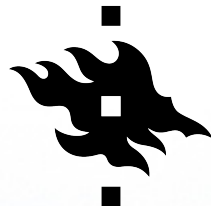In view of three perspectives that are relevant to the issues.

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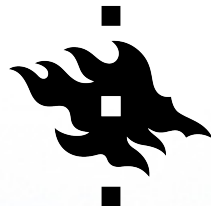
ELF CHANGES ENGLISH?

• How can we test such an assumption?

- the notion of ELF
- Reasonable hypotheses
- methodological issues

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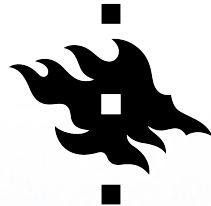
THE CONCEPT OF ELF: CONTACT LANGUAGE

- ELF is a contact language

- A second-order /higher-order contact between 'similects' (first-order contact between a given L1 and English).

- Other lingua francas are like ELF in being second-order contacts (i.e. based on previous learning),

- vs pidgins where no common language exists to start with

- ELF differs on account of scale – the sheer number of languages in contact with English -> the default global language; digital space, where English holds a firm position.

- Importantly, ELF is non-local, i.e. relevant beyond localities where English has an official status.
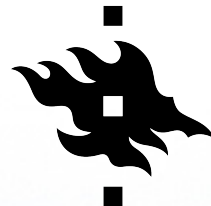
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THE CONCEPT OF ELF: COMPLEXITY

- ELF as a complex system?

- A systematic (sometimes perhaps unsystematic) ambiguity of 'complexity in language'.

- One is the opposite of 'simple', derives from 'complicated' (thus 'complicatedness'), refers to complicated systems in language.

- Overall degree of complexity in a natural language controversial and hard to assemble conclusive evidence on,

- if broken down to components (i.e. syntactic, morphological or lexical complexity), comparisons are both possible and interesting.

- This kind of complexity, 'highly complicated', relevant to change and relevant to ELF.

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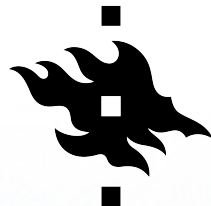
THE CONCEPT OF ELF: COMPLEXITY

- The other kind of complexity refers to complexity theory and 'complex systems'
- Self-organising, dynamic systems operating on different scales in time and reach
- Languages can be seen as complex, dynamic, adaptive systems as a whole but they also incorporate various smaller systems (closed and open classes, lexis, structures…)
- When a sufficient number of unsettling features enter a system, it will be in need of reshuffling itself -> self-organising to a new state

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THE CONCEPT OF ELF: COMPLEXITY

- ELF is complex in both senses of the term
- heterogeneous and variable, also in some respects unstable ('fluid')
- But this is true of language overall (although relatively stable isolated communities foster complicated grammatical systems and change more slowly)
- By only increasing variability ELF may leave many English systems untouched
- But variability makes it more 'diffuse' in LePage and Tabouret-Keller's terms, and undermines the 'focused' nature of English as a national variety in countries like the UK and the US.

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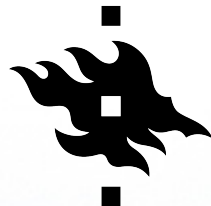
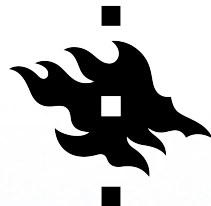# WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM ELF? MACRO-SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

The complexity of the aggregate or umbrella 'community' of all thinkable speakers actually using ELF likely to affect the observable outcome of ELF speech .

With so many similects coming into contact with each other, we can expect to find a considerable degree of variation along similectal lines

< can be assumed from numerous SLA studies

Learning a socially different phenomenon from use, especially if we consider classroom learning on the one hand and use in ordinary life.

If this is so, other SLU varieties should bear more affinity to ELF than to SLA.

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WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM ELF? MACRO-SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

It is also reasonable to expect repetitions of similar forms and similar expressions across speech events and language backgrounds.

Possibilities:

1. they reflect 'Angloversals', i.e. something in English itself invites certain phenomena from L2 speech (-> ELF features should be similar to all other L2 varieties),

2. there might be features that merely or primarily only occur in ELF (-> ELF is specific; could be used to see whether/ how SLU is different from SLA, expected on the basis of the different social situational parameters).

3. The features have already been spreading in ELF use

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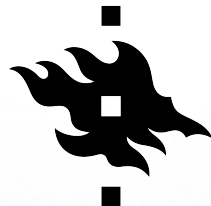
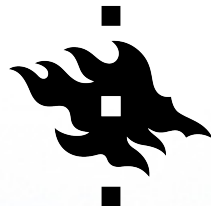# WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM ELF? MACRO-SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

Sociolinguistic research suggests the consequence of extensive contact is simplification.

Trudgill (2011): (1) language contact and (2) adult SLA conducive to overall simplification.

Both apply to ELF.

Trudgill suggests these lead to increasing morphological transparency, loss of redundancy, and loss of 'historical baggage'.

Kusters (2003) looked at several language groups in a variety of sociolinguistic circumstances: languages used as lingua francas are more amenable to simplification than those spoken in closed speech communities (cf. Milroy & Milroy (1985)

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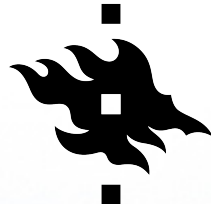# WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM ELF? MACRO-SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

- Structure a commonly assumed site of simplification resulting from language contact (e.g. Croft 2000; Thomason 2001, Trudgill 2011). However, simplification can be of many kinds – morphological, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, etc.,
  and possible trade-offs between these seem hard to detect (Nichols 2009).

- Thus, certainly likely that ELF is affected by simplification processes – but which in particular?

- The main macro-social consequences of ELF use would definitely be those that emanate from real-world contact, including the now ubiquitous digital contact

- We might reasonably expect to find regional trends, based on shared cultural history, in addition to language typological similarities and previous language contact histories.

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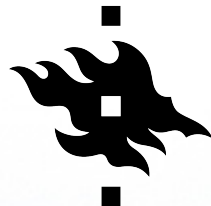
WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM ELF? COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE

From the individual's (cognitive) standpoint,

ELF usually the speaker's second language,
more weakly entrenched than the first.
We may expect a second language to display more fuzziness in processing compared to a first language.

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WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM ELF? COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE

Lexical simplification predicted for language contact much less if at all.

But it has been observed in learner language (e.g. Altenberg & Granger 2002; Granger 1998; Granger & al. 2002)

as well as in translations (e.g. Laviosa-Braithwaite 1996; Nevalainen 2005; Tirkkonen-Condit 2005)

In both cases simplicity is seen as the proportional over-representation of the most frequent lexis.

Usual explanation for learners gaps in learning and interference from L1

But translators work towards their L1, so it is put down to interference from the L2!

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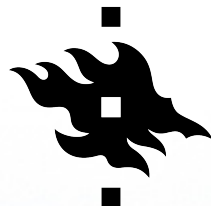
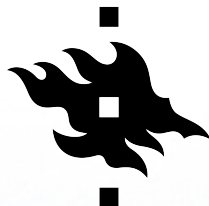# WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM ELF? COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE

My suggestion: the common, more general basis is language contact.

Language contact as activated in translating from one language to another or speaking a less well entrenched language should lead to an enhanced reliance on the most frequent vocabulary:

If two competing systems are active in a speaker's repertoire, the best entrenched parts of each are likely to become more salient.

-> unique features of the languages likely to get suppressed (noted in translations Tirkkonen-Condit 2004).

In productive cognitive terms, then, one of the consequences of language contact could be the relative overrepresentation of the most frequent lexis of the language that is currently being used.

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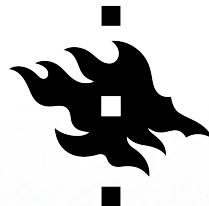# WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM ELF? COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE

Speakers tend to economise on their effort in expression and the constraints of working memory,

-> expected to find individuals settling on certain preferred expressions for given meanings (< cf. one-meaning-one-form principle or isomorphism)

Hearers: weak entrenchment applies to the hearer as well - approximate forms may not be harder to understand than precise forms,

because a typical ELF hearer is not precisely attuned to Standard English but likely to rely on fairly fuzzy processing for sense-making

Such matching of cognitive processes is collaborative activity -> also interactional consequences: acceptance of approximate forms in interaction.

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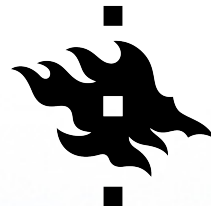# WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM ELF? COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE : FREQUENCY

Frequency an important mediating mechanism between language use and language change.

It is well established that frequent items behave differently from infrequent ones
and survive longest even over very long periods of time

The cognitive correlate: stronger entrenchment of the most frequent items, -> well represented in ELF;

The interactional consequence would show in accommodation, especially in speakers' likelihood of finding common ground for fluent communication.

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WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM ELF? MICRO-SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

Innovations do not diffuse without interacting individuals

At the same time, individual cognition is crucially shaped in interaction with its social environment.

Accounts of language change implicate accommodation as a key mechanism

Croft 2000: a response to speakers from outside one's own community.

Speakers compensate for the lack of common ground by adjusting their speech, e.g. by elaborating content or simplifying grammar (Giles & Smith 1979).

Enhanced explicitness and rephrasings would be closest to Gile 'elaborating the content'
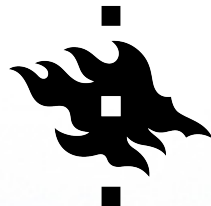
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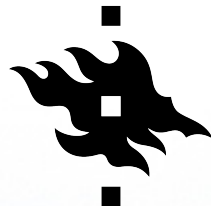# WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM ELF? MICRO-SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

BUT explicitness and rephrasing can also result in discourse adaptations that can become drivers of grammar.

In the long term, structural changes may follow from continued large-scale ELF interaction, perhaps above all by altering preferences

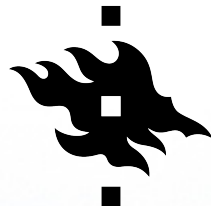i.e. certain kinds of structures become more common while others get rarer.

Some kind of 'communicative fitness' in an element is likely to help it spread into common use and become preferred

"Other things being equal, speakers naturally prefer structures which are easier to produce; and through failure to communicate, they learn to avoid structures which are difficult to understand." (Dabrowska 2004: 67).

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WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM ELF? MICRO-SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

- Interactional viewpoint on simplification: speakers from different backgrounds looking for the least common denominator to support interactional fluency, -> best guesses those that are the most widely shared.

- The most widely shared features may also be especially salient or particularly learnable features of a given language reflecting 'subjective simplicity' (cf. Miestamo's (2009) user-oriented or 'subjective complexity')

- Interaction between speakers of different similects may favour features that are most conducive to successful communication over features that are not (or are 'ornamental' cf. Szmresanyi & Kortmann 2009).
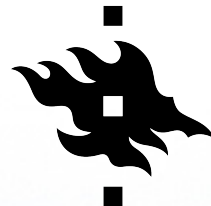
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IN SUM: MAJOR PREDICTIONS

- Three relatively strong predictions,
- 1. simplification < previous research and from all our three perspectives.

  Caveats: overall simplification is unclear and difficult (maybe even pointless) to measure; English is a comparatively analytic language, and may therefore be less likely in need of major structural simplification.

- 2. forms that approximate the target and may become strengthened < cognitive and interactional considerations,

  increases variability. < also predicted based on similect contact, macro-social perspective.

- 3. highly frequent items should be strengthened in ELF < both cognitive and interactional positions
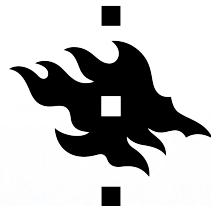
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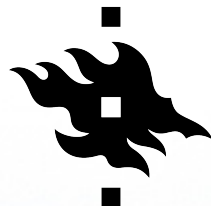
IN SUM: MINOR PREDICTIONS

- So far less certain predictions, can be reasonably postulated as probable in ELF:

- Fixing: the counterpart of approximation - settling on a preferred expression that may be either non-standard or rare in English in general (otherwise it would hardly be noticed). < cognitive and interactional processes.

- Explicitation: as a discourse strategy likely to arise from speaker accommodation and recipient design; may result in preferences for explicit syntactic structures.

- Shared multi-word items across similects: particularly interesting, as they should represent the specifcally ELF-like features arising from the particular combination of English and a complex similect contact.

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RESEARCH APPROACH: THE CASE OF ELFA

- Mixed:

    Corpus research (ELFA and WrELFA– including SciELF and SciENG

    Discourse Analysis

    Ethnographically informed research (SELF, LDIC)

- Advantage: enabling the tracking of on-going linguistic change and language mixing
  while also doing fieldwork among the participants

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CORPORA (1): APPROXIMATION ->VARIATION

- **Variable expressions for the same meaning**

On the opposite, according to previous studies, AC can act as reaction site,

Opposite of some other studies,

In contrary to previous investigations on the topic,

…higher channel gradients, coarser sediments and contrary, pool-riffles had greater width/depth ratios

Now, two *antagonist* effects can occur during the treatment by O_3AC coupling
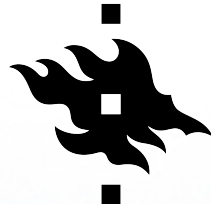
CORPORA (2): FIXING ON A PREFERRED PATTERN

```
  were evaluated as stage "1",    on the opposite, high occurrenc   Sci17.txt 358 1
 ly broken by the valley, and,    on the opposite side, the flat    Sci20.txt 361 1
  during high-magnitude floods.   On the opposite, boulders with    Sci22.txt 363 1
  fluvially dominated channels.   On the opposite, relatively lar   Sci22.txt 363 2
 on recently prevails (Fig. 5).   On the opposite, the most downs   Sci22.txt 363 3
 in area than other groups and    on the opposite, very poor depe   Sci23.txt 364 1
 form: W=3.228A0.20 (R2=0.49).    On the opposite, bankfull depth   Sci23.txt 364 2
 th steeper resulted trend and    on the opposite, lower calculat   Sci23.txt 364 3
 ivera-Utrilla et al., 2011).     On the opposite , according to    Sci39.txt 380 1
 es  and the new martyrs stood    on the opposite side of the mar   SSH41.txt 460 1
```
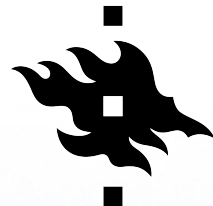
DISCOURSE ANALYSIS (1): DISCOURSES OF STANDARDS

Standard languages primarily constructed on the basis of the written text and for the written text.

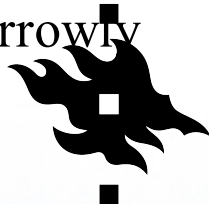Speaking and writing treated differently in language regulation
Hynninen (2012), (SELF project):

- teachers and students comment on and correct language more frequently in written texts than in each other's speech.

> acceptability wider for speech;

- comments on writing more often concerned with correctness

> acceptability defined more narrowly

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS (2): NEGOTIATING BOUNDARIES

S13: lecturer; other speakers: students; S5 giving presentation with slides

<S5> … again some benefits and disbenefits it's very rapid growth and very adaptable to er different climates [as well] </S5>

<S13> [er disbenefit] is not an english word so try to find something else </S13>

<S14> which one </S14>
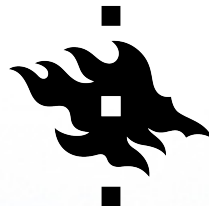
<S13> er disbenefit so it's [er problems] <SU-3> [detriments] </SU-3> or detriments or whatever but <S14> oh yeah </S14> yeah </S13>

<S5> okay [i i didn't] <SU> [@(xx)@] </SU> come up that @one myself@ [but (xx)] </S5>

<S13> [it's good to develop the english language] you can always do it </S13>

<S5> yeah of course i can </S5>

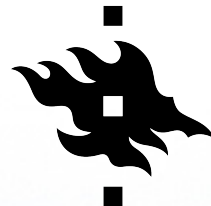<SS> @@ </SS>

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ELF BOTH SIMPLIFIES AND COMPLEXIFIES ENGLISH

- Regularisation is a form of simplification.

- Increased variability makes a system more complicated.

- Increased variability also makes a system more complex: new elements entering it through the process of approximation potentially throw the system (or any subsystem in it) off balance.

- When unsettling features enter it, the system is in need of reshuffling itself.

- Not dramatic in individual cases, but a large number of, say, approximations, produces the effect in the aggregate.

- If we take languages to be complex, self-organising systems, approximations and subsequent fixings operate towards the self-renewal of language.
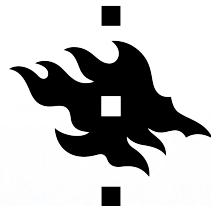
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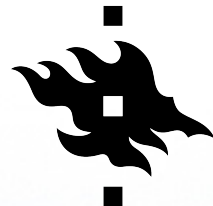
ELF RESEARCH IN CHANGE

- ELF research is changing – multilingual approaches (Jenkins 2015; Cogo), the questioning of fixed sets of languages and the permeability of language boundaries – does this mean there are no languages?

- The reality of languages in people's minds. How do ordinary people feel about languages they speak?

-    The 'multilingual turn' in various language research and discussion in the last few years

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ELF RESEARCH IN CHANGE

- We have not really been addressing questions like private sphere (but some, like ELF couples, Pietikäinen); children of ELF couples; longitudinal work in case studies (abut Tiina Virkkula); migration (but some, like Guido).

- Written discourses - now starting in academia. Where else?

- Methodological approaches: Multimodality has been with us since the mid-1990s, so about twenty years, but not at all big in ELF

- Or linguistic landscapes.

- In all: what really happens in language change in the age of superdiversity?

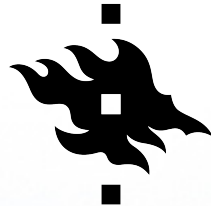**UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI**

FINAL HYPOTHESIS

ELF and complexity:

Approximation is a process that works towards a chaotic (repeller) state, i.e. increasing chaos and unpredictability

Whereas fixing tends towards a (new) attractor state.

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THANK YOU!