

Backchannels and repetition in ELF in a hairdressing setting

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Abstract

This article deals with communicative interaction in English as a lingua franca (ELF). I discuss how backchannelling and repetition are used in hairdressing studies carried out in English. I begin with a short view on previous research and move on to describing my material, which was recorded at a Finnish vocational college. After this, I show how my informants use backchannelling and repetition and discuss possible explanations. My analysis shows, for example, that the informants self-regulate their language and establish a group norm for use. Many of the discovered characteristics in interaction appear to result from the working environment and the special professional field of hairdressing.

1 Introduction

“English is now the language of those who use it” (Kachru 1985: 20).

The above quotation from Kachru describes well the status and situation in which the English language is in today’s world. English has become an international language used all over the world in numerous different contexts and settings. English is a part of people’s everyday life even in non-native communities and the language is often used in situations where no first language speakers are present. The term *English as a lingua franca* (ELF) is nowadays widely used for this international usage of English where speakers from various linguistic backgrounds interact. ELF refers to “communication in English between speakers with different first languages” (Seidlhofer 2005: 339).

As ELF and its characteristic linguistic features (which differ somewhat from Standard English) are gaining recognition, the international nature of English will probably have an effect on language teaching in the future. However, the status of English has already changed teaching in general so that English is used more and more as the language of education in different schools and institutions, and many people are studying in English in ELF contexts. This is also the topic of my study: ELF and studying in English as a lingua franca.

This article is based on my MA Thesis “*Yeah yeah short hairstyle but anyways there was lots of backcomb hairdos and lots of makeup and kajals*” *Spoken interaction in ELF in a hairdressing setting* (Lammi 2009). My research focused on vocational education, more specifically, a hairdressing programme at a Finnish vocational college. I explored how a selection of interactional and cooperational features are used in hairdressing studies carried out in English. I focused on backchannelling, repetition and turn-initial *yeah*, *but* and *well*. In this paper, I present some of the findings on the most

common and omnipresent features in my material: how backchannels and repetition are used in the spoken discourse of the hairdressing studies.

2 Features of spoken interaction: Backchannelling and repetition

What is crucial in spoken discourse is that both parties participate in the dialogue all the time. This means that even the listener must be alert and active, and cannot be just passively listening. The listener is supposed to provide silent feedback, like head-nods, smiles and eye-glances, but this is not enough and s/he is also expected to give some kind of small oral responses to acknowledge the incoming talk and to react to it (Carter and McCarthy 1997: 12, Stenström 1994: 81). These minimal responses are called *backchannels*.

In backchannelling “speaker remains speaker, and hearer remains hearer” (Schiffrin 1987: 99). Thus, backchannels are short verbal responses that the listener makes without aiming to take over speakership (McCarthy 1998: 176, Aijmer 2002: 135, Stenström 1994: 5). They are not proper turns as such. Typical English backchannels are utterances like *ah, oh, mhm, yes/yeah, right, really, I see, that’s right, sure, quite, good heavens, of course, oh dear, oh God, that’s nice, and that’s not bad*. Laughter is also one of the most common types of backchannels (Stenström 1994: 83).

In general, backchannels are used to show interest, display understanding, acknowledge what the speaker says, and to encourage him/her to continue. Thus, they “indicate that a piece of talk by the speaker has been registered by the recipient of that talk” (Gardner 2001: 13) and “help the current speaker along while manifesting the listener’s attention” (Stenström 1994: 81). Example 1 on backchannelling is from Stenström (1994: 82, original emphasis, backchannels given in bold):

Example 1

- A: ... and I’d got the ((PRICKLES)) all night#
 B: **M#**
 A: I couldn’t keep STILL# and I – I didn’t want him to TELL them# and I didn’t had no APPETITE# for FOOD#
 B: **M#**
 A: ((I)) staggered THROUGH it# – flew back home the next DAY# . whisked into this HOSPITAL#
 B: **GOODNESS#**
 A: but ə |ðə| that’s all RIGHT# they can {CURE} MALARIA#

Although backchannels mostly just acknowledge the teller’s continuing speakership they may also affect a telling’s direction (Mandelbaum 1989, as cited in Drummond and Hopper 1993a: 157). Therefore, what a backchannel ‘does’ depends on the lexical item that is chosen (Stenström 1994: 81). Aijmer (2002: 136) suggests that “markers of surprise (*oh are you, (oh) really*) ... invite some stronger reaction for the purpose of keeping the conversation going” than utterances like simple *oh* and *yeah*. Using the utterances *oh are you* or *oh really* instead of just *oh* signals that the speaker “has not only acquired new information but there is evidence for some conflict between what he thought earlier and learns from preceding talk” (Aijmer 2002:136).

Gardner (2001: 2-3, 34, 40) divides backchannels (or response tokens as he calls them) into several categories, four of which appear in my data: continuers (typical examples are *mm hm* and *uh huh*), acknowledgement tokens (*yeah* and *mm*), the newsmarker group ('change-of-state' token *oh* and the 'idea connector' *right*), and the 'change-of-activity' tokens (*okay* and *alright*). Gardner explains that the continuers "function to hand the floor back to the immediately prior speaker" (2001: 2-3) when acknowledgements, in turn, show understanding or agreement of the previous turn. Gardner also notes that *yeah* is the most frequently used backchannel and that *mm* is a weaker acknowledgement. Newsmarkers signal that the prior speaker's words are noteworthy, and they function as reactions to a turn that is new to the listener. Change-of-activity tokens, then, "mark a transition to a new activity or a new topic in the talk" (ibid.).

When it comes to forms of repetition in spoken discourse, Tannen (1989: 54) distinguishes self-repetition from allo-repetition, which refers to picking up utterances from another participant's speech. Repetition may also vary from exact repetition (using the same words and rhythmic pattern) to paraphrase (expressing similar ideas in other words), leaving repetition with variation in the middle of this scale. Example 2 illustrates lexical allo-repetition, with the repeated items given in bold:

Example 2

- MARGE Can I have one of these **Tabs**?
Do you want to split it?
Do you want to split a Tab?
- KATE **Do you want to split MY Tab?** [laughter]
- VIVIAN No.
- MARGE Kate, **do you want to split my Tab!?**
- KATE No, **I don't want to split your Tab.**

(Tannen 1989: 57; my emphasis)

Repetition is a common feature of speech – it is at the heart of how discourse is created and "an essentially poetic aspect of language" (Tannen 1989: 46). All language is, to some extent, prepatterned but pre patterning is "a resource for creativity. It is the play between fixity and novelty that makes possible the creation of meaning" (ibid.: 37).

In McCarthy's (1998: 113, 115) view, repetition – both exact repetition of vocabulary and relexicalisation by which he means content re-casts in different but near-synonymous words – is an important aspect of the naturalness of speech. He argues that "the ability to vary one's lexis while still saying more or less the same thing pushes the discourse forward and gives out important interactional signals". It is also a basic characteristic of vocabulary patterning and a very significant feature of lexical competence. McCarthy (1998: 113-114) explains that exact repetition (syntax, lexis and intonation) is not always pragmatically appropriate or it may stall the topical progression of discourse. Instead, varying one's lexis and also picking up another participant's words "can be seen as a co-operative gesture by the speakers, 'explaining themselves' for their listeners" (ibid.: 115).

When considering the question of why there is repetition in conversation, Tannen (1989: 48) categorizes the purposes, which repetition simultaneously serves, into production, comprehension, connection, and interaction. To begin with production, repetition gives the speaker time to formulate their next expressions so that the speech is fluent all the time. Turning to comprehension, Tannen (1989: 49) argues that the

redundancy in speech enables less dense discourse and, thus, repetition facilitates comprehension. The ‘connection’ function means that repetition has also a referential and a tying purpose in discourse: it shows how new expressions and ideas relate to earlier ones (ibid.: 50).

The functions of production, comprehension and connection relate to the creation of meaning in discourse. However, repetition also serves a significant function in interaction as it helps with “accomplishing social goals, or simply managing the business of conversation” (Tannen 1989: 51). Tannen has found the following interactional functions of repetition when analysing her material: getting or keeping the floor, showing listenership, providing back-channel response, stalling, gearing up to answer or speak, humour and play, savouring and showing appreciation of a good line or joke, persuasion, linking one speaker’s ideas to another’s, ratifying another’s contributions, and including in an interaction a person who did not hear a previous utterance. What this means is that “repetition not only ties parts of discourse to other parts, but it bonds participants to the discourse and to each other, linking individual speakers in a conversation and in relationships” (ibid.: 51-52).

In addition to the categories of production, comprehension, connection, and interaction, Tannen (1989: 48) defines an over-arching function “in the establishment of coherence and interpersonal involvement”. Talk itself is involvement and it shows willingness to interaction whereas repetition is a resource to keep talk going (ibid.: 52). When one repeats the other speaker’s utterances, one accomplishes a conversation, shows response and acceptance, and gives evidence of one’s own participation.

3 The material and the informants

The data of my study consist of audio-recordings made at a vocational college in the Helsinki metropolitan area. The data are naturally occurring, that is, I recorded real-life spoken interaction that took place during hairdressing lessons. My aim was to affect the recording situation as little as possible so that the data represent everyday spoken discourses taking place between the informants in their normal working environment.

The material, on which I concentrate here, consists of 95 minutes (11 261 words) of recorded spoken interaction. The group of informants includes 17 hairdressing students and one of their teachers. The students came from two different teaching groups, and they did the whole study programme leading to upper secondary vocational qualification in English. Most of my informants speak Finnish as their native language but there are also speakers of Persian, Turkish and Bahasa Indonesia. The recordings consist of lectures given by the teacher, other discussions between the teacher and students, and conversations between the students.

3.1 Is it ELF?

It might be claimed that my material is not clear-cut ELF data as most of the informants are Finnish speakers and as I also take examples from discourses where all the speakers in fact speak Finnish as their native language. However, one has to take the whole interactional situation into account. Even though the non-Finnish speaking

students may not say anything, they are still present in the classroom situation and this certainly has an effect on the communication. On the basis of my data, it is quite clear that when there is no reason for communicating in English, that is, when all the participants know Finnish, the students switch into Finnish.

It should also be noted that the aim of the English speaking study programme is that after graduation the students can successfully communicate with customers who do not speak Finnish and can get information that is not provided in their first language. The students are not learners of English as they do not deal with linguistic issues in their professional studies. The students are aiming to become hairdressers and in their studies they use English as a tool – just as they use a pair of scissors. Based on this, I conclude that the data of my research represent ELF usage.

4 Backchannels and repetition in use

I make a clear-cut distinction between backchannels and full speaking turns: no responses that contain more utterances than a simple minimal response (or after which the speaker changes) are transcribed or analysed as backchannels. In many respects my view on backchannelling is in accordance with Stenström's (1994) and Aijmer's (2002) ideas. That is, I see backchannels as short responses that show interest and understanding as well as encourage the speaker to continue. I also believe that the lexical item chosen as a backchannel reflects the listener's attitude – whether it is indifference, interest or something else.

Backchannels are very common in my material. The informants use backchannel responses all the time in their interaction. My data provide examples of the backchannels *yeah/yes*, *mhm*, *okay*, *exactly*, *(oh) really*, *oh*, *oh my god*, *well*, *why* and *that's good*. Laughter is often used in this function as well. The two most common backchannels in the material are clearly the responses *yeah* and *mhm*. After these come laughter and *okay*, both of which are used several times. *Yes* is used notably less than *yeah*, supporting Drummond and Hopper's (1993b: 205) claim that *yes* is quite rare in casual conversation, whereas *yeah* is more typical. The rest of the above backchannels occur only once or twice in these recordings and, as a result, not much can be said about their functions.

4.1 Yeah, mhm

The feedback utterances *yeah/yes* and *mhm* are generally used in a similar way to express acknowledgement, understanding and encouragement. They function as continuers and acknowledgers. However, it seems that there are slight differences of usage between the teacher and students, and the students further have different ways of using backchannels depending on their interlocutor. When taking part in a discussion with the teacher, the students seem to use backchannelling as a way of showing that they are listening and understand what the teacher is saying, as in Example 3¹:

Example 3

<S5> so what do we have tomorrow </S5>

<T1> we continue with the ah hairdos </T1>
 <S5> okay </S5>
 <S11> i want to learn how to do backcombing </S11>
 <T1> yeah that is a what [we] <S11> **[yeah]** </S11> have to do we we try to do tomorrow at least two different hairdo for long hair <S11> **[yeah]** </S11> [and for] short hair <S11> **yeah** </S11> and we are going to d- start it and we are going to finishing it <S11> **yeah** </S11> and finishing means that we are er we are going to through we are going through step by step all the things [about it] </T1>
 <S11>[yeah] thing was like a when we put rollers on the hair like i couldn't do backcombing so i can like cover the holes , like the holes still show somehow <T1> **yeah** </T1> like (xx) have to learn that </S11>

In casual conversations among themselves, the students encourage the speaker to go on and show listenership. They indicate to the speaker that they are interested in what s/he has to say (Example 4):

Example 4

<S15> is <NAME> <NAME> still there </S15>
 <S7> yeah she's still there she's (taking) the nails now <S15> **oh really** </S15> she ah she p- she went to this course , but she can't do customers like , <S15> **why** </S15> til one year or something cause she has to first like , she's (tell) s- s- something like she h- first like it takes eight hours to do the to to do the nails <S15> **yeah** </S15> and then she need to take like , ah other course and then it takes four hours and it she has to she has to practise them like for ah for her friends for six months and then she takes some exam- examination [after six months] <S15> **[mhm mhm]** </S15> and then after that only she can do , do the nails , so it's quite rough and and she can't even do like manicures before she has ah done the whole , <S15> **mhm** </S15> after after after the six months </S7>

Turning to the teacher's way of using backchannels, the function seems to be to acknowledge the students' speech and answers and, by doing this, to encourage them to carry on speaking. The teacher's encouragement can be seen in Example 5 where she notices that the student is struggling with expressing his/her thoughts and immediately responds to this with the backchannel *yeah*:

Example 5

<T1> yeah , do you have any any other opinions about it </T1>
 <S7> i i disagree about that (the) people think that fashion is beautiful and it it might be something really ugly as well (and but it's [just some-]) <SU> [(xx)] </SU> and it can be something that you erm like just as a statement to it can be something really different as well even though it's not like what the major people have it can be just like some ideas of of past or some some some (xx) ide- idea- ide- ideologies <T1> **yeah** </T1> about something and it can be like style as well , but , if there's ah fashion there's like style behind the fashion <T1> **mhm** </T1> of course , and the way to do the fashion </S7>

What is then different in the teacher's way of using backchannels compared to that of the students'? Example 5 is interesting also in this sense, as it provides one of the just two instances where the teacher uses *mhm*. She usually relies on *yeah* or *okay*, which are slightly more active responses than *mhm*. I suggest that the fact that she uses *mhm* less than the students may indicate that she takes a rather active role with backchannelling, wanting to show her involvement and interest in what the students answer and say.

4.2 Okay

The functions of *okay* in my material are in most cases in accordance with Gardner's (2001) interpretation (see section 2). In Example 6 student 5 signals that the discussion may be closed, as she has got the information that she needs:

Example 6

<T1> have you have any break since , you have have but havs- have how about
 <NAME> have you have any break since morning </T1>
 <S5> break </S5>
 <T1> yeah </T1>
 <S5> no </S5>
 <T1> you you can take it some break too <S5> **okay** </S5> just just the same
 than the <NAME> <S5> **exactly** <S5> yeah </T1>

In example 7, however, the teacher is expecting more information (see the beginning of her next turn), even though she relies on the backchannel *okay*.

Example 7

<T1> ...who say so (TO OTHER STUDENTS) , i hear that <SS> @@ </SS>
 (yeah) who is not coming to next w- </T1>
 <S13> i i have to go to , <FOREIGN> savo </FOREIGN> <T1> **okay** </T1> i told
 you about it <P: 06> my flight is leaving [tomorrow] </S13>
 <T1> [oh yeah] you told me , i just recog- didn't recognize your voice , @who who
 else is going to say well i'm not going to be here anymore@ </T1>

Thus, *okay* is sometimes used in a similar way as *yeah* and *mhm*, to acknowledge the speaker's turn and to encourage him or her to go on.

4.3 Other backchannels

The instances where the backchannels (*oh*) *really*, *oh* and *oh my god* are used clearly show that here the listener has heard some new information that s/he finds surprising. This is also highlighted by the use of rising intonation. In these cases the listener is expressing more eagerly her or his wish that the speaker ought to continue. In addition, these backchannels show personal involvement and emotions. In example 8 the aspect of emotion is clear:

Example 8

<S2> okay er and som- something else i tried with <NAME> we had this hair-
hairdo er and we should er make some wave here and here curly ,
<SHOWING WHAT SHE MEANS ON HER OWN HAIR> ah and and as as
much as i backcomb @the hair@ of the doll the lines were (a state) there and
hen- <NAME> then showed me h- how to er really backcomb it to that the line
disappear and he did it , and it was really well but when he went af- after 15
minutes again (they separated) automatically and the line , become visible so
so is it er , is it <FOREIGN> n- nukke </FOREIGN> doll like this or er in real
@customer also it can happen@ </S2>
<T1> it can [happen f- for real too] <S2> [oh my god] </S2> but that is what we
are practising like today we are going to do this for middle length like...

On the basis of the few examples that I have in my data I would agree with Aijmer's (2002) view on the differences between using simple *oh* and markers of surprise like (*oh*) *really* (see section 2). As used in example 9, uttering the response *oh* indicates that the listener has received some new information:

Example 9

<S3> ah should we do like in the picture because it's different what you doing
now </S3>
<T1> yeah it is different but we try this first <S3> oh </S3> <P: 14> tail is really
handy when you have to add hair , to your rolls , so you get a nice tidy result
of winding...

Then again, using backchannels like (*oh*) *really* suggests that the listener has got new information, which differs from his or her earlier ideas, as in Example 4 above where student 15 is clearly surprised to find out that one of their friends is not working just as a hairdresser any longer.

Laughter as backchannelling seems to be used to acknowledge the speaker's comments and the humorous tone of the turn. What is different from the usage of other backchannel responses is that in situations where there are several listeners, more than one person often take part in the laughter at the same time. When one listener laughs, others join in, and thus, laughter is a sort of collective backchannel. In example 10, the students react to the teachers joke with a laughter backchannel and, thus, acknowledge and show appreciation of what she says:

Example 10

<SU> <NAME> can we have a break <SU>
<T1> <SIGH> let's take a break friday hey it's only couple of days left okay of
course you can have your break @@ , i couldn't <SS> [@@] </SS> [help it
again] </T1>

Since backchannelling is typical of casual conversation, it is hardly surprising that backchannels are found here in one-to-one interaction. More interesting is the fact that in this data, vocal backchannels occur also during the lectures where the teacher is introducing new theory and tasks to the whole class. The function of backchannels in these situations does not clearly differ from the other cases. Thus, one might argue that perhaps these backchannels are the result of the casual, informal and relaxed

atmosphere of the lessons. However, it should be remembered that signalling comprehension is important even during monologic speech, as in lecturing, and in these cases the listeners usually resort to nodding and smiling. Nevertheless, this practice does not seem to work in the teaching context of hairdressing, where the teacher typically demonstrates the theoretical issues that she is talking about, and in these situations looks away from the students. Consequently, silent backchannels do not work very well, and I suggest that this may be why they are vocalized instead.

4.4 Repetition

Taking into consideration the importance of repetition and the several functions that it serves in conversation, it is not surprising that repetition is a common interactional feature in my material. The informants produced various different examples of repeating each other's words either with exact repetition or relexicalisation, and these repetitions serve various functions. I wish to point out that each repetition can have more than one function and the functions may overlap.

Many of the repetitions in the material are based on the technical terminology of hairdressing. This means that when discussing a certain topic the teacher and students use standardized professional vocabulary that everybody in the class knows and that is generally used in the field. As a result, the same terms are uttered several times in the course of a conversation. In example 11, student 6 comes to show her work to the teacher (she has previously suspected that there is something wrong with her hot irons because the curls that she is doing do not look as they should):

Example 11

<S6> er i have done different with <NAME>'s **iron** and this is [my own] </S6>
 <T1> [so it's the] , so it can be the **irons** then </T1>
 <S6> yeah i think so <T1> yeah </T1> because now i i have [(xx)] </S6>
 <T1> you can see that yeah , is there any other what you can then try to change
 or have you (xx) <P: 06> i quickly try to find if we have any of those **crimping
 irons** in here [(xx)] </T1>
 <S6> [okay] </S6>

The same term is repeated here as it is the standardized way to describe the tools that are used. At the same time the repetition connects the discourse together and moves it forward. It is also important to notice that the repetition keeps the topic clear and in this way structures the discourse.

The usage of professional terminology does by no means explain all the instances of repeating the other person's words in the data. This is clearly illustrated in Example 12, a discussion where the teacher is talking to student 7 about the effects of colouring one's hair too often (there are many different repetitions in this extract but here I concentrate on the verb *colour*):

Example 12

<T1> okay now you have to think it by your own (xx) that how how well how close
 this goes now because you know the ingredients of the products and what is

doing to the skin and scalp and , <S7> [yeah] </S7> [yeah] a little bit scary isn't it </T1>

<S7> hmm or do you mean cause it's been **coloured** so often <T1> yeah yeah </T1> hmm but cause i- </S7>

<SU> he's our client too </SU>

<T1> oh right </T1>

<S7> cause they asked me to but otherwise if i hadn't come i wouldn't have **coloured** it this week so </S7>

<T1> okay so they [blackmailing you] </T1>

<S7> [with the ah] <SU> @@ </SU> well yeah they blackmailed me there but but i would have **coloured** anyway so <T1> yeah </T1> <P: 06> but i have this new cerastase shampoo for sensitive scalp now i'm trying so <T1> yeah </T1> . @maybe that will help@ </S7>

<T1> yeah you know how much is help by yourself </T1>

<S7> oh yeah mhm , but ah i don't know cause anyway you have the you have the , how what's difference if you **colour** your hair once a month or once a week if you have the same hair in there and the same scalp </S7>

<T1> yeah but if you if you think that if you **colouring** your hair once in a once in a month and you think that you peeling the skin in that time when you use some colour and and ah (xx) and you what what is the different if you keep doing it once in a week or once in a month <S7> yeah </S7> that is the different it's not a big deal for hair you know <S7> mhm </S7> is is end of end of it is dry hair anyway but <S7> mhm </S7> the scalp , and the skin problems later on </T1>

<S7> but if [(xx)] <T1> [(xx)] </T1> what if i now stop and try to i won't **colour** anymore </S7>

<T1> oh [(xx)] <SU> [@@] </SU> scare you but i just want to to understand now </T1>

<S7> mhm i [haven't thought about it] </S7>

<T1> [because yeah] that is what you have done now and that your whole own work is all about it so <S7> mhm </S7> i i thought that you have even think about it already </T1>

<S7> not but not about the colour <T1> yeah </T1> that much </S7>

<T1> yeah . yeah </T1>

What I find interesting here is that the quite common alternative term *dye* is not used at all. In fact, there are no occurrences of the verb (or *dye* as a noun) in my data. This suggests that, as the underlying aim of all discourse here is that the students learn a profession and manage to convey a message, the word choices and form do not matter very much (this is also illustrated later in example 13). Once a 'good enough' expression that gets the message across has been settled, the informants stick to the wording. An alternative explanation for the absence of this term is that perhaps it is considered to be more formal or more typical of written language than the verb *colour*, which is favoured here.

Another example of holding on to an utterance that has been successfully used in communication can be found in a conversation about fashion and style (Example 13). Here the original speaker perhaps actually means *the majority of people* in Standard English, but his/her utterance is picked up by the others:

Example 13

<S8> style is something ah , it can be really unique and personal but fashion is like , what **major people** , consider nice and beautiful and all that (xx) sometime but like everybody can have their own style and they don't need to be fashionable </S8>

<T1> yeah , do you have any any other opinions about it </T1>

<S7> i i disagree about that (the) people think that fashion is beautiful and it it might be something really ugly as well (and but it's [just some-]) <SU> [(xx)] </SU> and it can be something that you erm like just as a statement to it can be something really different as well even though it's not like what the **major people** have it can be just like some ideas of of past or some some some (xx) ide- idea- ide- ideologies <T1> yeah </T1> about something and it can be like style as well , but , if there's ah fashion there's like style behind the fashion <T1> mhm </T1> of course , and the way to do the fashion <S7>

...

<T1> yeah because it's quite a quite a often that you take only some part of the latest fashion or some style of it if i can call it that way and then we make our own style and the **major** style is what is the what what we call and how we start looking for this time that ...

In a way, repetitions like this could also be seen as the result of inadequate language skills. It could be claimed that the speakers use the same utterances again – as long as they have conveyed the message earlier and even if they have originally not been the best word choices for the purpose – because they do not know how to express the matter in other words. However, as my informants have generally very few problems in communication, I would say that this is more likely a case of efficiency and production. If there is no need to reformulate the utterance, why do so. Thus, this example can also be seen as an illustration of the group's self-regulation and how the informants establish a kind of group norm for use.

One of the most important functions of repetition in the material is showing acceptance. It is particularly common that the teacher acknowledges and accepts the students' answers by repeating their words (Example 14):

Example 14

<T1> okay , we have a <NAME>'s hair here . and , if we use this kind of rolls , what kind of what size of the curls are going to be or what kind of hairdo she is going to have if we use all this , length in here </T1>

<S2> **very much vol- volume** </S2>

<T1> **very much volume** , how w- how the curls are going to look </T1>

<S2> **not very curly** </S2>

<T1> **not curly** at all i guess <S2> yeah </S2> okay then we take a little bit smaller size...

The teacher clearly uses the student's words in her own turn in order to show that the answer is correct. Thus, in a way she uses repetition as an alternative to the word *yes*.

The final function of repetition that I wish to mention here is making sure that one has heard and understood correctly what the other participant of a discussion said. Thus, repetitions are used as confirmation checks:

Example 15

<S7> is it something bad </S7>

<S14> no </S14>

<S7> no </S7>

<S14> just that she said **that there's probably no , ah this opportunity that she can pay for us** (for the) </S14>

<S7> what you said that </S7>

<S14> on on the job learning [period] </S14>

<S7> **[that] there's no opportunity that she's** <S14> [yeah] </S14> **[going] to pay us** </S7>

<S14> yeah but she ah told me to call her this week , and ask for it <S7> yeah </S7> she promi- she promised to think about it but </S14>

Here S7 first clearly signals that s/he did not hear what was said and, then, as s/he does not get the response s/he was hoping for, s/he uses repetition to get confirmation for what s/he thinks S14 said.

5 Conclusion

In this paper, my aim has been to illustrate some of the ways in which the interactional features of backchannelling and repetition are used in classroom situations of hairdressing when communicating in an ELF setting. I discovered that when using backchannels, the students differentiate their behaviour according to who they are talking to. The teacher, in turn, uses more active backchannels than the students. I also noticed that, being a collective backchannel, laughter differs from other minimal responses. What is more, I suggested that some of the otherwise silent feedback is vocalized because of the working environment. Turning to repetition, my results implied that the word choices or form of messages do not matter as long as the meaning is successfully conveyed. The informants are efficient communicators: if there is no need to reformulate the utterance, why do so? The group of informants also seems to construct some norms for language use of their own – that is, they have established their own ways of dealing with important topics; ways that work for them. In addition to revealing these characteristics, my results also showed that the informants use the interactional features in many cases in a similar manner as participants in previous research. This also means that their conversations in this respect do not differ very much from those of English native speakers.

The results of my analysis further support an observation that can already be reached when browsing through the transcripts (or when listening to the recordings): the informants have generally very few communication problems. They are mostly successful in communicating and conveying messages and thus the English language as a tool in their studies does not seem to be a hindrance in the development of their professional skills. It can be argued that the informants are, with no doubt, very

competent ELF speakers and that their language skills will be an asset in their future careers.

Notes

¹ In my transcripts, the speaker codes <S5>, <S11> and so on refer to particular students. <T1> is the teacher. <SU> refers to an unidentified speaker and <SS> to several speakers.

Transcription conventions

I followed the ELFA corpus transcription system (http://www.helsinki.fi/elfa/ELFA_transcription_guide.pdf). Special symbols used in the text are explained below.

Speaker codes:

<S#>	Students
<T1>	Course teacher
<SU>	Unidentified speaker
<SS>	Several simultaneous speakers

Symbols:

<S1> </S1>	Utterance begins/ends
(text)	Uncertain transcription
(xx)	Unintelligible speech
@@	Laughter
@text@	Spoken laughing
,	Brief pause (2–3 sec.)
.	Pause (3–4 sec.)
<P: 05>	Pause (5 sec. or longer)
[text]	Overlapping speech
<S1> mhm </S1>	Backchannelling marked within speech turns
<NAME>	Names of people and places
<FOREIGN> text </FOREIGN>	Switching into a foreign language
<PREPARING OVERHEAD>	Other events that affect the interpretation or comprehension of what is being said

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Riikka-Liisa Lammi got her MA from the former Department of English, University of Helsinki in 2009. She did her thesis “*Yeah yeah short hairstyle but anyways there was lots of backcomb hairdos and lots of makeup and kajals*” *Spoken interaction in ELF in a hairdressing setting* under Anna Mauranen’s supervision. She currently works as an English teacher.