In recent years, there has been a great deal of animated talk about 'Global English', with 'English as a lingua franca (ELF)' becoming (so to speak) a *cause célèbre*. Many opinions have been expressed about the cultural, socio-political and other issues raised by the global spread of English. However, very few researchers have addressed the essential descriptive question of just what ELF looks and sounds like, how it is actually used. But empirical research into ELF has been gathering momentum of late.

This paper will report on the first broad empirical basis for investigating specific questions regarding the use of ELF in various domains: the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE). I will discuss specific methodological problems that arise when dealing with ELF data and home in questions that can be addressed once corpus compilation is complete and the corpus is made freely available.

Using some examples of findings in the field of lexicogrammar that are emerging from the analysis of the spoken interactions captured in VOICE I will aim to show that the general processes and salient features that are emerging as characteristic of ELF use are entirely compatible with our understanding of how languages always vary and change according to different circumstances.

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