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Lingua franca research explained

Book review

*English as a Lingua Franca: Perspectives and Prospects: Contributions in Honour of
Barbara Seidlhofer*

Marie-Luise Pitzl & Ruth Osimk-Teasdale (2016)

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The recent book edited by Marie-Luise Pitzl and Ruth Osimk-Teasdale, aims at identifying the nexuses between ELF (English as a lingua franca) and related fields. It is organized around two main sections, i.e. *Perspectives on the study of ELF* and *The study of ELF in a wider context* under which there exist three sub-sections that focus primarily on the ELF's relationship with domains like sociolinguistics, multilingualism, policy and pedagogy.

The first main section opens with Jenkins' chapter where she summarizes Seidlhofer's major contributions, such as the compilation of a spoken corpus, establishing an ELF journal and reconceptualization of ELF, to the ELF research. The second chapter by Mauranen brings to the fore the need for an ELF corpus, emphasizing the challenges ELF corpus linguists can

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face, differences of ELF corpora from learner corpora and methodological approaches in compiling ELF corpora, among others. This is followed by Widdowson's chapter which discusses the concept of standard English and how it is grounded in native speaker usage and norms. He especially takes issue with the problematic concept of variety, and proposes the notion of adaptive variability as an alternative, according to which it is rather natural for speakers to display variable adaptation in their linguistic acts according to different contexts and purposes of communication. Therefore, speakers are not required to conform to any particular norms of a certain variety, as actual language use is mostly irregular and inconsistent in applying conventional rules. Turning to BELF (Business English as a Lingua Franca) in the next chapter, Cogo explores the issue of diversity in BELF contexts in lights of discourses and ideologies concerning diversity in BELF with findings from two case studies. She concludes that ideologies shape people's practices in the companies according to the modes of communication, i.e. back-stage and front-stage, the former of which allows more room for mixing one's linguistic resources and attaches more importance to one's expertise, but mostly in informal spoken exchanges of communication than speaking like a native speaker. However, in the front-stage activities, such as advertising and marketing, an ideology of homogeneity dominates people's language use as mixing languages is not seen favourable due to the strong emphasis on discourses of correctness in such (written) activities. The next chapter by Guido considers the issue of ELF misunderstandings caused by ELF speakers' L1 transfer and native socio-cultural schemata, such as religious beliefs, to the interactants' varied language use during communication where asymmetric power relations exist between ELF speakers. She concludes that for a successful ELF communication in migrant encounters, speakers should be aware of one another's diverging and overlapping cultural and experiential schemata. As she notes, it is because it is not ELF differences in usage that lead to misunderstandings, but mostly schematic departures blocking effective accommodation among speakers. Similarly, dealing with ELF but in relation to higher education settings in northern and central Europe, Björkman outlines extant research in those settings on EMI (English-medium instruction) and ELF, and draws attention to the dramatic increase in the number of ETPs (English-taught programs) in little more than a decade. She concludes that researchers "acknowledge the significance of sociolinguistic challenges brought on by globalized European HE and consider the local setting at a finer level" (p. 64) in future research on ELF and EMI. In the following chapter, Lopriore examines the recent changes in some Mediterranean European countries' language education policies and practices through the lenses of ELF research, and notes that although English is perceived as a threat to the EU's avowed discourses about multilingualism, plurilingualism and local languages, an ELF perspective indeed favours promoting different forms of multilingualism and attaches great importance to linguistic diversity. Therefore, she recommends that an ELF-aware perspective should be incorporated into European countries' language documents, teaching and learning materials and above all, teacher education programs so that teachers and students can start questioning their stereotypes about English and relevant issues, such as native/non-native division. This is followed by Murata's chapter on ELF research and its effects on language policies in Japan. Drawing examples from some Japanese cases, including EMI settings and the use of native-oriented Japanese version of CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), she concludes that despite two-decade long ELF research, language policies and teacher hiring practices in Japan are still

bound by correctness norms and native-speakerism criterion and that relevant stakeholders, including ELT scholars and policy makers, seem to be unaware of how speakers actually exploit their linguistic resources when English serves as a lingua franca. Similarly but from a different perspective, Kohn draws attention to the need for scholars to move from ELF communication to lingua franca pedagogy and argues for the possibility of reconciliation between standard English norms and pedagogic implications of ELF research on the proviso that non-native English speakers should be granted creating agency. To illustrate his argument, he provides some case studies that are done by telecollaboration in which students went through an ELF transformation through exposure to “intercultural contact and communicative interaction among speakers from different lingua-cultural backgrounds” (p. 91). Kirkpatrick’s chapter closes the main section with personal accounts from his own observations and experiences regarding language learning and acculturation. He outlines some incidents in his language and culture learning life, reaching the conclusion that despite most people’s being multilingual and –cultural on earth, these assets are set aside and people are expected to act normatively in their linguistic acts, submitting themselves to monolingual, monolithic and standard norms of a certain variety and culture. In his view, an obvious example of this situation is the ELT sector where NESs (native English speakers) are taken as ideal targets, and another one being EMI higher education where international students from diverse linguacultural backgrounds are enforced to stick to native English norms. He thus argues that it is time to change the common mind-set by training NESs for intercultural ELF communication instead of imposing certain norms on multilingual and multicultural NNEs.

In the second main section, the focus shifts to a wider perspective on ELF, which is addressed by authors from different branches of linguistic in three divided subsections. The first subsection opens with Schneider’s work scrutinizing the nexus between World English (WE) and ELF, with an emphasis on their similarities and differences in regards to their historical and conceptual development and the role of ESL in their emergence and further growth as fields of study. He concludes that although they are not the same phenomenon in substance and focus, they both emerged as a reaction to the disregard of non-native speaker usage, but with ELF being more encompassing than WE, as ELF deals with issues across the circles of English users, while WE remains limited to the study of linguistic stabilization in post-colonial countries situated in the outer circle. The next chapter by Trudgill is on the relationship between lingua franca usages and formation of new mother tongue varieties. Drawing on a case from Bronin islands, he asserts that lingua franca usages, especially in multilingual communities, impact upon linguistic forms of new emerging dialects, leading to simplicity, transparency, simplicity and independent developments in the use of linguistic structures. He believes this is also true for English being used as a lingua franca and gives the example of ‘Multicultural London English’ and provides evidence about how people from different L1s actually increase regularity and simplicity in areas of phonology and grammar, and how “a somewhat simplified and mixed variety can eventually become fully nativised” in the long term (p. 120). In the next two chapters, we see that scholars, Schendl and Ritt address ELF through lenses of historical linguistics. Schendl notes that what ELF has been experiencing in terms of lexico-grammatical and phonological innovations are quite similar to what other lingua francas and early English had experienced particularly before they were codified, adding that innovations in lingua franca

settings occur out of particular needs of multilingual speakers. Unlike Schnedl, Ritt takes an ontological perspective, arguing for the need for labels such as ELF and English to be established in the literature and suggests it can be done by analysing such labels from the tenets of ‘brute facts’ and ‘institutional facts’ of John Searle. The next chapter by Larsen-Freeman deals with how a non-teleological view of language aligns with the ELF principles, drawing arguments from complexity theory that sees language as an adaptive and complex system changing through innovations and creative usages. Viewed in this way, ELF, she believes, has the makings for even SLA as innovations also occur yet mostly within the bounds of the linguistic system. This is followed by Keizer’s work that argues for the utility of functional discourse grammar notion of transparency for ELF research when analysing various forms of morpho-syntactic elements. She contends that transparency can serve as a utilitarian tool in attempts to explain particular structures, ground them in a wider theoretical context, systematically analyse morpho-syntactical deviations in ELF usage. The final paper of the section is by Kaur who maintains that Conversation Analysis (CA) can contribute to ELF research, with the presentation of some key findings from earlier ELF studies having employed CA. She concludes that despite earlier reluctances against the use of CA in ELF research, CA has a lot to offer ELF researchers in respect of exploiting linguistic resources for mutually successful exchanges, using several accommodative and interactional strategies.

The rest of the second main section is followed by the second subsection with a number of chapters that tackle with the ELF question from multilingual and multicultural perspectives. Kua gives us a brief background of the intercultural communication research with the turning points that differed in terms of their approach to culture (culture as a nation vis-à-vis interculturality). She states that pushing aside the standard-oriented linguistic proficiency has given a new perspective to understanding intercultural issues in communication, thus linguistics output in ELF conversation is not considered ill-formed anymore. Kaur (2011) has found that misunderstandings can rarely be language-related, and discursive ambiguity as well as inadequate world knowledge are mostly influential. As she concludes, culture’s role is minimized in ELF conversation with strategies to accommodate discourse for clarity and effectiveness, and negotiation of the ELF culture and identity-related references take an important place. Then Kramsch starts with a notion of English-for-success that used to promote the domination of American or British English. ELF, on the other hand, constitutes a cosmopolitan culture, as she says, “at the planetary level” (p. 180). She shares a study example in which a team collaboration is carried out in French as a lingua franca to show that people’s approach to the language gradually would move away from “the language of problem-solving” (Walker, 2009) understanding to the notion of language as a foreign-sounding tool when the common experience is not present. Thus, she considers the experience that constitute the individual’s identity as the building block of ELF communication. Next, House starts by questioning whether the widespread use of ELF might pose a challenge for the discipline of translation in the sense that translation might lose its role. She is straightforward in answering the question and explains that ELF contributed to the translation industry indirectly by increasing the need for multilingual news, contributing to e-learning and being needed in localization industries as a result of and in parallel with the globalization process. She disagrees with the traditional idea that translation should be carried out only towards the L1 by holding

forth the prevalent need for translated content to be addressed to international ‘consumer’ for readability and clarity. Lastly, she touches upon the task-based approach to translation, and states that translation into ELF serves the purpose depending on the objective of the work and the type of translation needed (see Nord, 1995 for the debate about text functions). The work by Hülmbauer presents a comparison of plurilingualism and multilingualism by showing the evolution of the terms. The former is at individual level while the latter is dealt at societal level. With immigration, multilingualism is considered as an integral component of society rather than a luxury like learning for popularity. Likewise, as she says, thinking of language proficiency as repertoires means getting away from a binary conceptualization (e.g., monolingualism vs. multilingualism) and having a richer understanding of it as “a continuum of linguistic diversity” (p. 195), in other words, in terms of a flexible model of linguistic proficiency.

The following chapters in the third subsection deal with the trilogy of ELF, policy and pedagogy and give us a bigger picture. Cook introduces the foundation of nationalist ideas that produce the debate about anti-immigration and linguistic purism in relation with the claims related to language change and gives examples about the political context in Europe. He applies the similar of concept of anti-pluralism within the classroom environment where it is translated now as direct method (e.g., Berlitz schools) that dictates the use of only English. Outside of the classroom, this echoes as the racist attitudes that does not tolerate any language other than English. He ends his argument with a suggestion to notice the harm of English-only policies on education and promote the use of bilingual activities as well as translation in classroom, which may sound controversial to some scholars like Harbord (1992) that would claim this move to be a step back to Grammar-Translation Method. The work by Tarone investigates the connection between SLA and ELF with a focus on learner language. Based on Canale’s (1983) framework of communicative competence, she claims that overemphasis on grammatical competence in classrooms results in insufficient communication with accuracy-oriented production. With the stories of Rodrigo and Antonio, two English language learners from Mexico from Tarone and Swierzbins (2009), she illustrates how accuracy focus entails accurate but simple sentences. Also, she highlights the role of strategic competence for meaningful and realistic interaction that is basically “to respond to genuine communication needs and interests in realistic second language situations” (Canale, 1983, p. 18), which is similar with the common scenario in ELF communication. McNamara and Shohamy’s work is a brief remark to draw attention to the changing definition of ELF, which will eventually entail serious reform in testing and assessment domain. The authors encourage questioning the role of the native speakers as criterion for tests and fairness of this rule while players like translanguaging and WE are in the ELF game now. Reiterating the message in Tarone’s chapter, they emphasize the need for bringing communicative competence into focus of testing by moving in the same direction with ELF reality. Then Dalton-Puffer and Smit explain that even the higher education makes a distinction between foreign and mother language in Austria although the number of English-speaking students and instructors is in increase along with the courses offered in English. They assert that Content and Language Integrated Learning (CEIL) has the potential to enlarge the scope of purposes for English use and to reposition the learner towards being a user of English to work with the content. Austrian context shows this gradual advancement of

English at schools from being a foreign language to evolving into ELF. As the authors conclude, English, gaining a footing for this reason, needs to be approached as different from a foreign language. The chapter by Brutt-Griffler and Kim is a good illustration for the latency of English to transform identities and to liberate the self from a unidirectional perspective towards a more diverse look. After an informative background about the changing social roles of women in Asia, they demonstrate how ELLs studying abroad adapt a gender-neutral attitude and discourse by combining quantitative data from Asian context and interviews with five Asian female students. Finally, they raise the question of whether ELF can be a shelter for gender equality with its diverse aspects brought by global communities. Next, Lo Bianco attempts to bring an explanation as to how the practice of language planning is linked with its groundwork in academia. He names “the likely impact of new academic knowledge when it is introduced into policy-making discussions” (p. 267) as ‘traction potential’. In order to make this potential strong, he adopts a negotiator role in the dialogue between academia and policy makers to prevent an ivory-tower-against-mainstream debate. Lastly, the afterword comprises eye-opening words by Pitzl, who discusses how the book came into being, and suggests forcing the borders of ELF even more in the light of existing literature.

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