

This is the first comprehensive monograph that addresses the phenomenon of English as a lingua franca (ELF) with particular reference to its use in academic communication. Naturally, it also covers issues of general lingua franca use, for example, by advancing a very rigid distinction between language user and language learner where the former term is said to apply to real ELF use with a focus on content and the latter to classroom situations, where emphasis is on language form. On the other hand, slogans such as “meaning before accuracy” or “meaning is paramount” have been part and parcel of foreign language teaching and learning ever since the advent of the communicative approach more than four decades ago, i.e. language learners are, on the whole, also seen as language users – and vice versa. It is, of course, true that language norms play a somewhat more important role in teaching a foreign language than in authentic ELF communication where such norms are assumed to be negotiated between the interlocutors and where insistence on native speaker rules can be counterproductive to communicative success. Contrary to other researchers in the field, MAURANEN takes a realistic view of Standard English, acknowledging its existence as “the unquestioned prestige variety at the moment” (2) and rightly adding that the balance between Englishes may well be affected by social and political changes on the international level. Whereas a lingua franca is generally defined as a medium of communication between people with different first languages, for whom it is a second language, MAURANEN restricts her definition of lingua franca to the single criterion of “a vehicular language used by speakers who do not share a first language” (8), thereby allowing native speakers of English also to be classified as ELF speakers in their linguistic interactions with non-native speakers of the language. There is not only a danger that such a redefinition of lingua franca blurs the understanding of the concept of lingua franca, but it also suggests communicative equity between native and non-native speakers of English, which by and large does not exist in such situations. In addition to dealing with such general issues, the first introductory chapter provides some brief information on the following seven chapters.

Chapter 2 views lingua franca communication from three perspectives; macrosocial, cognitive and microsocial; which relate to the societal, the individual and the inter-individual microsocial level of face to face interaction between speakers. As regards the macrosocial level, ELF is treated as a global phenomenon of the same significance as the global economy, mobility and the Internet. Rejecting the idea that a single identifiable community of ELF speakers exists, and invoking concepts such as community of practice and imagined communities, MAURANEN sees academia as a highly suitable area for ELF research, since it is international and not easy to identify due to the diversity of its main “institutional actors” (23), which are universities, research groups, publications etc. After a detailed discussion of these three perspectives and their interconnections several interesting hypotheses emerging from the ongoing linguistic and cultural diversity of ELF are developed, e.g. that simplicity in grammar, complexity in lexis and explicitness in discourse can be seen as the result of this process of diversification and that “speakers adapt to ELF circumstances by accommodating and converging, but also adapting to variability”
As regards the cognitive perspective, it is argued that ELF speakers approximate English forms and “resort to processing shortcuts that benefit economy and fluency, such as multiword sequences” (57). Furthermore, it is stressed that the use of English as a global lingua franca is certain to have an impact on the English language as a whole and probably also on native English-speaking communities. Chapter 3 emphasizes the significance of academic speech as being one of the major domains of international communication through the medium of ELF. Spoken academic language is at the centre of the book because, in the past, as the author informs us, research on academic English almost exclusively dealt with written English, in particular with the research article, “the flagship of research genres” (72), whose publication is, after all, still the most important medium for advancement on the academic career ladder. Furthermore, Mauranen questions the significance of ENL-modeled research into ELF, because, as she points out, “the determinants of language use lose their connections to a national basis” (68).

The empirical research of the book is based on the ELFA corpus, a one million word corpus compiled at several Finnish universities, which consists of recordings in ordinary university settings such as conference presentations, PhD thesis defence presentations, lectures, seminar presentations and discussions etc. The corpus, which lends itself to quantitative and qualitative analysis, covers a wide spectrum of disciplinary domains including the social sciences, medicine, humanities, behavioural and natural sciences, economics and administration as well as technology. In a first comparison between the ELFA corpus and the ENL (English as a Native Language) MICASE corpus, it can be shown that the word lists of the 50 most frequent words are remarkably similar, which means that the differences between the two types of speakers were only slight, at least in the field of language use. Chapters 4 and 5 provide a wealth of information on the use of vocabulary and grammatical phenomena in speaking ELF. Naturally, there are important differences between the two groups of speakers, but it is striking that, for example, vocabulary in ELF speech had a lot in common with ENL speech whereas this similarity did not apply to written ENL when comparing it to ELF and ENL speech. While the two preceding chapters deal with intrasentential characteristics of spoken academic ELF, chapters 6 and 7 focus on discourse explicitness as well as repetition and rephrasing, respectively. The very thorough and insightful analyses clearly demonstrate the functionality of academic ELF usage, which in many aspects reveals great similarity to ENL usage. Grammatical accuracy, however, is assigned a secondary role, as the success of spoken interaction does not seem to depend very much on linguistic correctness. The analysis of repetition phenomena revealed that they can help the “content-oriented development of topics and negotiation of concepts, cooperative solving of language problems, and doing facework” (230).

The concluding chapter 8 summarizes the implications of the empirical research. It addresses issues relating to the practical relevance of ELF, discusses the results with regard to the theoretical postulates made in the first two chapters and develops some perspectives for future research. As regards language teaching and testing it is rightly pointed out that the use of ELF in European higher education has become ‘normal’ and that a narrow orientation to Standard English can lead to communication problems. This holds particularly true for spoken ELF interaction, where phonetic norms have become quite flexible. To what extent the linguistic variability of ELF applies to written communication, e.g. in learned journals, is probably a different matter. It is a well-known fact that native speaker editors are described as gatekeepers for non-native researchers’ publications. The demand “that assessment should not be left to the hands of ENL evaluators” (239) can be welcomed from an ELF perspective and is probably unequivocal for the spoken context, but, presently at least, not very realistic for the written mode. It is true that educated native speakers’ stylistic or rhetorical preferences are not inherently superior to those scientists who use a second language in scientific communication (cf. 242). And since Anglo-American
rhetoric is not (always) necessarily the most effective for structuring academic texts, it seems only logical to argue that “academic authors need to raise their awareness of the kind of English that serves them best when they look for international recognition” (242). Comparing ELF and ENL grammar it was found that the postulate of simplification did not manifest itself in a straightforward manner, i.e. non-standard structures could also be complex and greater structural variety was also observed among ELF users, “suggesting weaker structural entrenchment” (244). The hypothesis that lexical complexity turned out to be a key feature of ELF had to be dismissed. Instead, lexis in academic ELF concentrated on the most common words implying that “language contact strengthens ‘core’ vocabulary at the expense of rarer words” (244). The assumption that enhanced explicitness was a characteristic of ELF could be confirmed: “metadiscourse, anticipatory markers of local organization, negotiating topics, rephrasing, and echoing were the main phenomena taken up and observed in their role of making discourse more explicit” (245). The final general hypothesis postulated at the outset of the book, that ELF speakers adapt to the linguistic and situational contexts by making use of accommodation and converging strategies, was also strengthened. Less surprising, however, is the finding that “academic ELF is very much like Standard English: the overwhelming majority of lexis, phraseology, and structures are indistinguishable from those found in a comparable corpus of educated ENL” (247). To the reviewer, this finding suggests that ELF users aim at ENL standards as a desirable communicative target. It should also be borne in mind that, as MAURANEN points out, ELF speakers need to invest more time (and money) to reach a sufficient level of successful communication, a clear indication of being communicatively disadvantaged compared to ENL users. As regards future research, the author, having concentrated on spoken academic ELF, stresses the importance to include the written mode for further research. This is certainly an urgent desideratum of research which should also consider the social and processual dimensions of academic writing in English as a lingua franca and second language, respectively.

*Exploring ELF* is a well-structured and accessibly written book, which addresses highly relevant issues of research into general and academic lingua franca communication. The author uses a sound theoretical framework and demonstrates comprehensive and deep knowledge of the literature; her findings are based on meticulous and painstaking empirical research. ELF has in the past been a field of research in which many original, but also daring and ill-founded ideas were able to develop. MAURANEN has successfully refrained from giving in to the temptation of making sweeping generalizations, while at the same time opening up new vistas and challenges that may arise as a result of the further development of English as a lingua franca. The author is to be congratulated for producing a study that can be considered as state-of-the-art research on spoken academic ELF communication – and this will probably remain so for the conceivable future.

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