

Introduction

English continues its triumph as a worldwide language of a previously unknown scale. The numbers of speakers keep expanding, and at the same time, the status of English is dramatically changing as a foreign language: native speakers of the ‘core’ varieties of British and American English are far outnumbered by bilingual speakers. In a recent report, Graddol (2006) predicts an end to English as a foreign language (EFL) as we know it, with native speakers providing the gold standard. He foresees the teaching of English becoming part of mainstream education worldwide, that is, a basic skill instead of just another foreign language. In this postmodern world, the myth of a uniform standard language becomes less and less relevant and harder to maintain.

The spread of English has been both investigated and debated (e.g. Phillipson 1992, Pennycook 1994 Brutt-Griffler 2002), but these studies have not paid much attention to language itself, and how its features take shape in different locations and in different functions. As English has made its way to all corners of the world, it has developed a number of varieties, some of which have institutional status, others not. The varieties indigenised in countries where English has an institutional status, the “outer circle” in Kachru’s (1985) terms, such as India, Nigeria, Singapore, South Africa, have not always been easily accepted as varieties in their own right, but with time they have increasingly become subject to linguistic research as well as to codification. The linguistic research community has been much slower to react in the case of English used as a lingua franca. While English as a foreign language (in Kachru’s “expanding circle”) has been studied extensively for a long time as ‘learner language’, the actual use of the language outside classrooms and learning contexts has been neglected until very recently. Learner English is of great interest in both practical and theoretical terms, and the need to study second-language use in its own right is not competing with that: it is simply doing different things. Many features of learner language are shared by ‘real-world’ second language speakers; conversely, we certainly open a new window to understanding second-language use by investigating English as a lingua franca.

Discussion on the necessity or desirability of the native speaker model for language teaching has been very much alive since the turn of the millennium, and it started even earlier in applied linguistics. English

2 Introduction

as the exclusive property of the native speaker was challenged notably by Braj Kachru in the mid-eighties (Kachru 1985), and Henry Widdowson in the early nineties (Widdowson 1994). Yet it seems that it is precisely in applied linguistics that it is hardest to accept the implications of English as the globally dominant lingua franca and a language which is predominantly used among non-natives. Language teaching is based on strong normative views despite the ideology of communicativeness, which has been with us for the last thirty years, and which remains the unchallenged mainstream of pedagogic thinking. The teaching profession appears to be constantly supplied with firm standards and guidelines about the received view of what is acceptable and appropriate in the language. This is what English as a lingua franca does not have. However, if the postmodern acceptance of several simultaneous standards develops as Graddol (2006) predicts, the attitude change which has been energetically advocated by Seidlhofer (e.g. 2001) is going to take place in the world of applied English linguistics.

Language contact research has mostly focused on contacts between two languages in a relatively stable contact situation. With the increased mobility in contemporary societies, such settings are becoming rarer. If we look at English in contact with other languages, the reality is already extremely complex: English can be spoken in encounters involving native speakers of practically any of the world's languages. Such complexity is most clearly reflected in the use of English as a lingua franca (ELF), and although it may appear to present a chaotic, even frightening view of endless variation, it is more likely that general constraints of human languages come into play and the variation is neither endless nor chaotic, and hardly arbitrary.

English as a lingua franca is a child of the postmodern world: it observes no national boundaries and it has no definite centres. In many ways, it is part of a transcultural flow, with its speakers using it in their own ways, constructing their own identities and forming their own groupings. English is the means of communicating with the rest of the world, but not only in a general or standard way. It is also, importantly, used by a plethora of in-groups and special domains all over the world. It takes many shapes, as we might expect of a language which is used in an age of accelerated mobility and new contacts. It offers a rich and intriguing research field to anyone interested in the ways in which

language changes, and in the ways that English is developing right in front of our eyes.

Research into English as a lingua franca, the study of ELF, is just finding its feet. It is a research area which is only at the initial stages of calling itself a 'field' of English studies – five or six years ago it was merely a suggestion, and not always welcome to more traditionally oriented scholars. The strong presence of the native speaker in linguistic theory has cast a long shadow on many fields of research as well as applications. Having said this, we must immediately add that it is by no means universally true: many scholars, especially among those investigating variation and change, have been immediately sympathetic to the idea of studying English in its nonstandard uses in today's global world.

Jenkins's (2000) seminal work on English phonology in contexts of international communication among non-native speakers was the first major description of ELF as a kind of language in its own right rather than as a deficient form of English. Jenkins's study was preceded by a few pragmatic studies of ELF (e.g., Firth 1996; Firth and Wagner 1997; Meierkord 1998), and research into pragmatics has continued strong (e.g. House 2002; Lesnyák 2004; Mauranen 2006; and several papers in this issue). Attitudes towards ELF have been charted (e.g. Erling 2004, Ranta 2004), and its status as a variety of English has been critically investigated (Mollin 2006 and this volume). A few papers in Knapp and Meierkord's *Lingua Franca Communication* (2002) were also concerned with English. Recently research has extended to lexicogrammatical features, metadiscourse and discourse organisation; new databases pave the way to a greater variety of approaches, and currently research groups are busy compiling ELF corpora (e.g. ELFA, VOICE), which enable larger-scale studies than hitherto.

As things are going, it looks like the study of ELF is well on its way to become an established domain of English studies. Papers in this volume indicate that interest in English as a lingua franca is growing, and that the focus is clearly on empirical studies of the language itself, even though the question of what implications this has on teaching also surfaces in some of the papers.

This issue of NJES begins with an exploration into the attitudes and feelings of university students in Germany to English as a lingua franca, together with typical features of their language. Elizabeth Erling and

4 Introduction

Tom Bartlett survey a number of lexicogrammatical and discourse features in the students' English, observing that overwhelmingly the same features are present in other varieties of L1 and L2 English in many different parts of the world. It is not therefore likely that what they find is either the result of particular first language interference or idiosyncratic uses. Erling and Bartlett conclude by strongly advocating an identity of New Europeanism, where ELF is a natural and legitimate common language.

A very different view is taken in the next paper by Sandra Mollin, who seeks to establish whether "Euro-English" can already be regarded as a variety of English in its own right. She sets out to investigate this with a corpus-based, largely quantitative approach. Mollin has compiled a corpus of both spoken and written data used in the context of the EU, and compares her database to Standard English corpora. Her findings suggest that European non-native usage varies too much to meet the criterion of a homogeneous and systematic variety. Neither does her data bear out hypothesized changes for instance in the case of the third person singular *s*. She concludes that ELF should be regarded as a register, not a variety. Discussing the pedagogical implications of her ELF findings, Mollin takes the cautious line that it is indeed the native speaker norms that should constitute the model in English language teaching, spiced with more intercultural skills than has traditionally been the case.

The third paper, by Alessia Cogo and Martin Dewey, starts from a more situated view of language, assuming that pragmatic and lexicogrammatical choices are closely intertwined. The article first investigates in detail pragmatic and interactive aspects of ELF conversations, and goes on to discuss lexicogrammatical features, focusing in on the controversial third person singular *s*. They show that a closer look into ELF discourse reveals new facets of the choices speakers make; the study throws new light on the third person *s*, or more precisely, its non-use. This turns out to be clearly dependent on the type of verb it is attached to (main or auxiliary) as well as situational parameters reflecting speakers' accommodation to their interlocutors. The authors also relate the loss of the *s* ending to findings from earlier language contact research, observing that ELF speakers behave in a fairly regular manner: marked features are likely to be lost, and this particular feature has a previous history of being lost in comparable situations.

Lexicogrammatical features are also the focus in Elina Ranta's paper, which addresses the frequent and divergent use of the *ing* form of the verb by ELF speakers. She looks into data from the ELFA corpus to illustrate how the use of the progressive by ELF speakers differs from that of native speakers. Although the 'overuse' of the *ing* form has often been described as a problem for non-native speakers in second language acquisition studies, the author finds no evidence of the feature causing trouble in communication in the data. In fact, the article suggests that the frequent use of the *ing* form could function in the opposite way: to prevent miscommunication in ELF. It also turns out that this feature is attested in the English of speakers from typologically very different first languages which makes it a candidate for a true 'ELF feature' and calls into question the common assumption that this kind of use of the progressive is either transfer from the speaker's mother tongue or a result of the teaching the speaker has received.

Maria Metsä-Ketelä continues to investigate spoken ELF in the light of the ELFA corpus. Her study takes up a phenomenon that is common to all languages and to spoken language in particular, namely vagueness. The article concentrates on the frequently occurring vague expression *more or less* and describes in detail its use and functions in academic lingua franca English. Comparison with the MICASE corpus shows that non-native speakers use the expression considerably more often than native speakers of English. In the ELFA corpus, *more or less* is used for multiple communicative functions affecting both the information content of the utterance and the discourse situation as well as the relationship between the speakers. The article concludes that lingua franca speakers are able to come up with innovative uses of vague expressions without compromising the effectiveness of communication.

The next two articles describe the two ELF corpora that are referred to in many of the other papers in this volume. The ELFA corpus is described by Anna Mauranen, who argues that a corpus based on academic speaking makes a particularly rewarding point of departure for ELF research: academic discourses are inherently international, they are sophisticated, demanding and influential, and a set of genres that native speakers have no greater claim to than non-native speakers. She describes the compilation principles of ELFA, outlining the main strains in the research it has already given rise to, and some new directions that it is taking.

6 Introduction

Angelika Breiteneder, Marie-Luise Pitzl, Stefan Majewski, and Theresa Klimpfinger present a thorough discussion of the issues that need to be considered when collecting a large electronic corpus of spoken lingua franca English. In the article, special attention is drawn to the compilation criteria that determine the quality of the corpus and the balancing act between theoretical specifications, methodological considerations, and practical limitations. The writers provide an illustration of the challenges and solutions they have encountered during the arduous but rewarding process of capturing spoken ELF.

The final article of the volume takes a look at written text in the location where we would expect to find the most traces of ELF: the Internet. Sirkku Aaltonen investigates the use of English on Finnish corporate websites and introduces features that could be submitted to more systematic study as features of ELF. On a more general level, the article discusses the suitability of corporate websites as a setting for ELF research. Aaltonen concludes that such websites can provide a useful background for the study of lingua franca English and she calls for further research on the topic.

This special issue is written in ELF. Although native speakers have not been excluded from the volume, they have not acted as the ultimate authorities of linguistic correctness or comprehensibility. Thus, the papers have not been ‘checked by a native speaker’, as the saying goes. As ELF-speaking editors, we have not imposed our idiolects on the papers with a heavy hand either. The writers are all expert users of English despite their varying status of nativeness. We hope that the readership finds the texts as clear and comprehensible as we do, and that the issues raised and the findings presented give food for thought for English scholars in the Nordic countries and beyond.

Anna Mauranen

Maria Metsä-Ketelä

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8 Introduction

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