Introduction

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It is generally acknowledged that English is the global lingua franca of academic communication. From the Second World War on, it has been unquestionably the major language of international publication, and more recently it has become almost exclusively the language of international degree programmes. For the overwhelming majority of its users, English is not a first language. In view of this, it is something of a surprise to see how little empirical research has been devoted to the lingua franca use of English, and how much instead the native-speaking population is still looked upon as the ideal model of academic English. However, since native speakers constitute a minority in the English-speaking world, their notions of what is most effective communication might not constitute a valid model for the rest of the world.

While there is widespread recognition that preferences with regard to language use tend to be socially determined – for instance by region, social standing, education – awareness of these preferences in academic rhetoric have been much slower in coming. Academic writing research has nevertheless investigated such issues with quite some intensity for a couple of decades (see e.g. Connor 1996), and among its perhaps most interesting findings is a certain exceptionality in Anglo-American writing: many features conventionally associated with Anglo-American text tend to take different shapes elsewhere. Many studies from widely different cultures have tended to converge on finding certain features of Anglo-American academic text different from those in their own, such as greater explicitness about the structure and purposes of the text, less tolerance of digressions and asides, longer paragraphs but shorter sentences and less complicated grammar, as well as a few other things (for a succinct list of common findings, see Swales and Feak 2000).

If we think of successful rhetoric as communicative effectiveness, in other words, as communication that convinces its hearers and creates a favourable impression, it would seem rather odd to equate features preferred by a linguistic and cultural minority with universal effectiveness. Clearly, what those who have English as their native language (ENL) are normally better at than those who use English as an additional language (EAL) or as a lingua franca (ELF) is getting grammatical and lexical forms closer to standard language. However, it is rarely the case that communicative effectiveness is best achieved by making correct grammatical choices (as anyone reading guidelines from the tax office can testify). It is also known from cognitive linguistic research that grammatical anomalies and ambiguities are well tolerated in everyday talk and mostly pass unnoticed by speakers and hearers alike (e.g. Levelt 1989; Dabrowska 2004); most people orient towards the contents of what is being said in a conversation, using forms as clues to meaning, not as foci of attention in themselves.

In situations where people come together from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds to pursue studies in a shared but not native language, it is natural to expect communicative difficulties. However, these manifest themselves far less than might be assumed at the outset (see e.g. Mauranen 2006; Kaur 2009). Speakers seem to achieve communication quite successfully in using a lingua franca, by joint effort. How they

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manage this, what linguistic and discoursal means they employ to achieve this, is an intriguing question. It even has practical implications. Given that some people communicate more successfully than others in complex linguistic environments, it is of considerable interest to seek to explain such differences, and to discover strategies that lead to communicative success. Studying communication in circumstances of non-native language use gives a perspective on communication that contrasts with those we already know much more about, such as conversations between speakers who share a high degree of linguistic and cultural assumptions, which have been the core areas in Conversation Analysis. Strategies that turn out to lead to success are obviously also valuable when we seek pedagogical applications from such research.

We can gain new knowledge about the workings of communication in a multilingual environment using a lingua franca by detailed analysis of language; this has been one of the leading motives of the research that is presented in the present volume. A purely linguistic interest is served by the second goal of analysing ELF in interaction: what effect can such extensive use have on the English language? Can we detect incipient changes, and can we learn something from the mechanisms of negotiating meanings and regulating linguistic group norms when we have access to real-time data, as opposed to the documentation accessible through written diachronic sources? The present data has an immediacy to it that cannot be captured by written material – which in its turn can offer a wider and deeper backdrop to observations of currently ongoing processes.

The two questions just outlined are well served by the compilation of a large electronic corpus of English as a lingua franca. The ELFA project[1] that all the studies in this volume stem from started out by compiling a million-word speech corpus in academic settings. The corpus with its compilation principles is briefly sketched out below in Mauranen's paper, but a more detailed description is to be found in for example Mauranen and Ranta (2009) and Mauranen, Hynninen and Ranta (2010).

Apart from looking at the direct linguistic manifestations of academics and students in ELF interaction, the question of participant experience is also relevant; it is by no means self-evident that if speakers achieve communication, this is done effortlessly and at no emotional or intellectual cost. Attitudinal research has sought to cover ideologies and attitudes in relation to ELF among students (e.g. Erling & Bartlett 2006; Ranta 2010) and language professionals (e.g. Jenkins 2007). Surveys of attitudes to English in higher education research also provide useful data on the fears, anticipated difficulties and the successes of running study programmes in English in non-English-speaking countries (e.g. Wächter 2008). Such research puts linguistic information in a much bigger frame of social reality, but this kind of data is far removed from actual situations of use. Attitude measurement does not capture speaker's immediate experience or reflection on a recently ended or still ongoing situation; talking to people in the middle of their courses, whether they are students or teachers, taps their experience while it is still fresh. One of the basic motives for setting up project SELF (Studying in English as a Lingua Franca)[2] as a daughter project to ELFA was to get closer to participants and their immediate experience of studying in a foreign language. A few of the papers in this issue (Hynninen, Pilkinton-Pihko) report on participant experiences and adopt a more ethnographic approach to the world of academic English use.

In addition, a new opening towards vocational education has been made in the SELF project (Lammi 2009, this volume). This is important, because it is a domain much less investigated than academia, and yet it is a fast-expanding field: not only hairdressers, but also taxi drivers, cooks, customs officers and countless others are in need of English in their working lives – and thereby also in their education or training.

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This volume of *Helsinki English Studies* presents empirical research on ELF in the ELFA project and its daughter projects: the ELFA corpus and the SELF project.[3] Contributions have been invited from researchers working in the projects as well as from other members of the team who have been at different stages in their studies.

We start with Anna Mauranen's contribution on features of ELF in academia, which serves as a background to the rest of the contributions. Mauranen first discusses the relevance of ELF in understanding the use of English in present-day academic communities, and continues by looking into some discourse and lexicogrammatical features in the ELFA corpus. She finds explicitation strategies that contribute to collaborative achievement of communication, and phraseological sequences that are much like those in ENL, but also suggest that ELF is developing specific preferences of its own. She argues for a holistic view on English for specific purposes, embracing both qualitative analyses of discourse in context and a large-scale view based on corpus research in investigating changing English. This holistic view is further reflected in other contributions to this volume.

Niina Hynninen explores participant experience. She analyses interviews conducted with students doing their studies in English. Her focus is on the ways in which students describe the kind of English they use and are used to in ELF settings, and conceptions of language use that can be gleaned from such descriptions. The findings suggest that students consider native speaker English and native speakers the best models for learning English, but at the same time they depict appropriate ELF use as different from native speaker English.

Discourse features in ELF lecturing are investigated by Jaana Suviniitty, who probes the use of questions as interactive features of lectures. Suviniitty asked students to rate lectures they had just heard, and selected three that were rated as the most comprehensible and three of the least comprehensible. Her findings suggest that the use of questions was one of the most clearly distinguishing aspects between the two categories, and her analysis sheds light on the ways the usage differs. It is shown that the greater quantity and variability of questions tends to enhance comprehensibility of lectures.

From questions as interactive features we turn to lecturer perceptions with Diane Pilkinton-Pihko's study on ELF lecturers' self-perceptions of their English. Her study is based on a self-assessment questionnaire and follow-up interviews with three lecturers who teach in English at a Finnish university. Her results suggest that the lecturers draw on three ideologies: "standard language ideology", "standard English native speaker language ideology" and "English as other", and that the lecturers' self-perceptions change depending on what they choose to compare themselves with.

The ELFA corpus is drawn on by Niina Riekkinen and Ray Carey. Riekkinen studies the use of lexical hedges by comparing them in the ELFA corpus with those in the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE)[4]. Her findings show that native speakers in MICASE and ELF speakers in ELFA use lexical hedges differently: different hedges were preferred and for instance hedges expressing personal evaluation were more common in ELFA than in MICASE. Both kinds of hedge use seemed to work in their contexts and no disturbance of communication was in evidence.

Carey looks into the role of English native speakers in the ELFA corpus. He picks a sample of transcripts from the corpus and analyses the way native speakers of English engage in cooperative discourse in an ELF environment. Carey takes examples of both successful and over-accommodative use of cooperative discourse features, and goes on to show the importance of their contextually appropriate use.

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A change of viewpoint from the language in itself is Anna Solin's contribution where participant views are tapped to shed light on the position of a newly imported genre. Solin takes up the 'teaching portfolio' genre that has been adopted in Finnish universities as an instrument of staff recruitment. Her analysis focuses on the linguistic resources used by applicants trying to fulfil the self-evaluation requirement of the portfolio. Solin's findings suggest that the implementation of the portfolio entails modification of the genre norms: Finnish portfolio writers tend to follow conventions of academic expression rather than conventions of promotional writing, which can be found in teaching portfolios written by Americans. The flow of discourse practices across locations thus seems to create modified versions of the practices, much like the spread of ELF.

The papers summarised above focus on ELF in university settings. The final article opens a new avenue: it looks into vocational education. Vocational education is increasingly taking English on board, because many work situations especially in the service sector involve intercultural encounters. Riikka-Liisa Lammi investigates backchannels and repetition in an English-medium hairdressing programme. Lammi's findings suggest that speakers sometimes create their own group norms of language use, for instance by choosing some terms over others. She emphasises the success of ELF communication in the English-medium programme.

In all, the contributions collected in this special issue suggest that in order to gain a holistic understanding of ELF communication, we need to approach language and discourse from different perspectives, and to incorporate studies that focus on the perceptions of actual users of ELF. There is a vast field to explore further, but the present papers make useful points about certain basic phenomena in lingua franca communication: speakers make good use of the linguistic resources they have, and achieve successful communication by collaborative effort. Some strategies are more successful than others – interactive questions, enhanced cooperative signalling, explicitation, rephrasing and repetition as well as accommodation contribute to greater communicative success than their opposites. All of these can be utilised in developing more effective teaching of English for specific purposes. The findings from the present papers also show that there is clearly some uncertainty about evaluating different kinds of Englishes: while non-native speech is regarded as easily comprehensible and appropriate in its contexts, native speakers' language is nevertheless set up as an ideal, even if unattainable model. Moreover, there is attitudinal resistance to what is felt to be an imported genre, but at the same time tacit acceptance of it as a fact of life.

Notes

[1] For the ELFA project, see http://www.helsinki.fi/elfa. The ELFA corpus of English as an academic lingua franca is introduced at http://www.helsinki.fi/elfa/elfacorpus.

[2] For the SELF project, see http://www.helsinki.fi/elfa/self.

[3] The ELFA corpus received funding from the Academy of Finland in 2004–2007 and the SELF project was funded by the University of Helsinki Research Funds for the three-year period of 2008–2010.

[4] For MICASE, see http://micase.elicorpora.info.

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