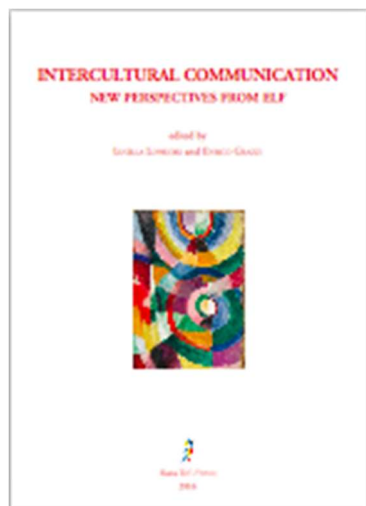




Intercultural Communication. New Perspectives from ELF

Lucilla Lopriore and Enrico Grazzi (eds.)

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Reviewed by Julia Boyd*

This volume is a collection of selected papers presented at the 6th English as a Lingua Franca conference held at the University of Rome Tre in 2013. As the editors Lucilla Lopriore and Enrico Grazzi point out in the introduction; over the past 20 years ELF research has gone well beyond the initial descriptive work on lexicogrammatical (Seidlhofer 2004), phonological (Jenkins 2000) and pragmatic (Meierkord 1996) features and the conference focused on the need to incorporate elements of sociocultural diversity into ELF research, such as the mutual accommodation of speakers with diverse linguacultural backgrounds and how they co-construct a shared lingua franca, in order to understand contemporary developments in the use of English as a 'glocal' language. The 24 chapters, reflecting the conference theme, are all linked by aspects of intercultural communication (IC) and 'interculturality' which lie at the very heart of ELF as Baker states: "communication, including IC and ELF, is never neutral; there are always participants, purposes, contexts and language choices, none of which are neutral."

The first section comprises 10 papers and focuses on aspects of culture and ELF in language teaching and teacher education and Diane Larsen-Freeman leads the way by proposing Complexity Theory to provide a framework for ELF research. She puts forward the notion that language is a complex adaptive system (CAS) (16) where language users adapt their resources to an ever-changing context and she illustrates the many parallels between ELF and language as a CAS.

Ana Monika Habjan's contribution considers the usage-based approach in analysing non-native discourse. She identifies the overlaps in ELF research and usage-based model research by means of examples of chunking, emergence on-line production and ad hoc constructions, contemporarily pointing out some weaknesses in the Linear Unit Grammar approach (Sinclair and Mauranen 2006).

* Julia Boyd (julia.boyd@unisalento.it) is a PhD student at the University of Salento. She was a contract lecturer from 2010-2014 for the Alcide De Gasperi University of Euroregional Economy, Jozefow, Poland and 2010 to 2013 at the University of Salento. Her areas of interest include ELF in mediated and migration contexts, interpreting for the Public Services and ELF and CLIL teacher training. Recent publications include: "The Role of the Interpreter for Public Services in the Province of Lecce" in *Revisiting Ethics and Ideology in Situations of Conflict FITISOS. Alcalá: Universidad de Alcalá.* (2014) "Do you speak ELF? La mediazione nella provincia di Lecce" *Lingue e Linguaggi 16/2015 Università del Salento* "The Gaps to CLIL" in *Innovation in Methodology and Practice in Language Learning. Cambridge Scholars* (2016).



The third contribution is by Pinar Ersin and Yasemin Bayyurt, who carried out qualitative research among pre- and in-service teachers of English in Istanbul to determine their attitude and identity in relation to ELF. The findings underline the importance of ELF aware training courses to avoid the native speaker ‘fallacy’ (Philipson 1992). Indeed, ELF can actually empower teachers, offering them the possibility to renegotiate a more positive professional identity due to a greater awareness of the status of English as a global and international language.

In Chapter 4 Paola Caleffi investigates whether current ELT materials reflect the status of English as the global lingua franca with a shift in the pedagogical focus from ‘form’ to ‘use’ (64). She reports that despite the growing trend to include sociocultural aspects of the spread of English (Vettorel and Lopriore, 2013), materials only too often reinforce the NS goal which effectively stifles appropriation and effective communicative use of the language.

The author of the 5th chapter Paola Vettorel brings our attention to the younger generation and reports on eTwinning projects in primary schools. This refreshing paper presents the heightened awareness and openness of children with regards to the lingua franca role of English and the IC skills which are fostered by these virtual exchanges. It appraises the language, IC and interpersonal skills children acquire via the eTwinning project which gives them the chance to «stretch their communicative capability and use their multilingual and multicultural competence to communicate» (Lopriore, 2015).

The next chapter by Enrico Grazzi and Stefano Maranzana focuses on the practical settings and pedagogical benefits of a web-mediated community of practice in a telecollaboration project aimed at fostering intercultural skills among Italian and American high-school students. The authors show how Web 2.0 can promote the creation of collaborative learning environments with increased student autonomy and participation allowing for authentic language in real and meaningful interaction (116) in line with Sociocultural Theory and Communicative Language Teaching.

Continuing with internet based activities, Barry Lee Reynolds and Melissa H. Yu present the findings of an ESP course for administrative staff following the Taiwanese policy to internationalize universities. The course aimed at developing ELF for IC via online watch, learn and speak phases and subsequent role plays in class were filmed and uploaded onto YouTube. The results show a very promising increase in the willingness to use ELF in work related meetings and with international students.

Lili Cavalheiro’s contribution ‘Developing Intercultural Awareness and Communication in Teacher Education Programs’ highlights the need for training in intercultural awareness and skills for pre-service teachers. Her research shows that NS culture and norms still dominate ELT in Portugal and she suggests adopting an ELF framework as proposed by Sifakis (2009) with a shift towards function rather than form (157) so that future students will reap the benefits of more realistic (152) and globally orientated language teaching.

Lucilla Lopriore approaches the delicate issues surrounding teacher education, taking local culture and policy, multilingual and multicultural contexts into account, as well as cooperative, reflective and language awareness approaches. Although the development of negotiation strategies needs further investigation (179), she concludes on a positive note, indicating the interest shown by native and non-native teachers in the advantages of ELF oriented courses which challenge traditional teacher knowledge and lead to greater IC awareness and skills.

The final contribution in this first part is the work of Sávio Siqueira who describes the need to further extend ELT practices by adopting critical pedagogy in order to ‘make the world a better place’ (Jeyaraj and Harland 2014). He stresses the need to question hegemonic attitudes which are grounded in notions of nativeness (Ortega 1999), especially considering his research findings which reveal teachers’ reluctance to include cultural aspects in their lessons despite recognizing the liberating and equalizing implications of ELF.

The second section is entitled ‘Communication in Plurilingual and Migration contexts: attitudes and interactions’ and groups together 8 papers. Maria Grazia Guido investigates how ELF is exploited by the Catholic Church as a channel of communication for the New Evangelization process. She reveals how the clergy enforce a one-way acculturated acceptance of their message which fails to take the diverse cultural schemata into account. Such a lack of ‘authentication’ (Widdowson 1994) of the language results in the discourse being cognitively linguistically inaccessible and culturally conceptually unavailable to non-western migrants (218).

Pietro Luigi Iala, Mariarosaria Provenzano and Silvia Sperti continue in the field of migration by analyzing the ELF subtitles of an Italian film in terms of hybridization (234) or levels of equivalence achieved through



summarization (van Dijk 1980) of culture-bound specialized concepts. The power/status/cultural asymmetry is investigated by means of a phonopragmatic analysis of linguistic and paralinguistic behaviours of standard and non-standard Italian utterances and their rendering into English subtitles.

Cristina Pennarola looks into the cross-cultural pragmatics involving emotions in two migrant forums, one used by immigrants to the UK and the other by British emigrants. Whilst the latter tend to be somewhat restrained in the emotional content of their posts, the former express their feelings and solidarity more overtly with other members providing examples of “how English can be adapted by its speakers to reflect their cultural norm” (Kirkpatrick 2007).

Bill Batziakas discusses flexible language use in naturally occurring speech in international student meetings where English is a common language. He shows the pragmatic function of ‘making specific meaning’ achieved by the resourceful use of linguistic repertoires in incorporating non-standard English lexical items into the ELF discourse (285).

Berat Başer turns our attention to the negotiation of interpersonal relationships in ELF which can be particularly delicate considering the diverse linguacultural conventions of the interactants. She discusses the applicability of theories such as the cooperative principle, politeness and accommodation when analyzing ELF interaction.

Paola Vettorel and Valeria Franceschi take us into the digital world to identify overlaps such as translocality (304) in ELF and computer-mediated communication. They look into online self-presentation on Web 2.0 and how language choice, plurilingual practices, code-switching and culturally-loaded elements are adeptly managed on international social network sites.

Moving into higher education, Athanasia Tsantila, Evanthia Ganetsou and Melpómeni Ilkos report on students’ attitudes towards accents in ELF. The results of their survey reveal a high level of tolerance for non-native accents with priority being given to effective communication although the majority of students still expect their teachers to have native accents.

Along similar lines, research on tertiary level education was carried out by Irena Vodopija-Krstanović who investigates the use of ELF among Erasmus students at a Croatian University with the aim of gaining insight into the status quo and improving IC within the Erasmus experience. She reports the flourishing use of ELF as a successful tool for IC in both social and academic domains supported by evidence that students “do not express an orientation to linguistic and cultural norms of native English speakers” (357).

The third section focuses on ELF in business (BELF) and academic (ELFA) contexts. We are taken into the world of business by Alessia Cogo who investigates a corporate community of practice to unravel people’s attitudes to IC and multilingual strategies in ELF. She concludes that pragmatic competence such as accommodation and acceptance of diversity together with a sound knowledge of the shared domain specific repertoire are indeed more pertinent to successful business communication than any sort of NS/NNS distinction.

Delving even deeper into corporate communication Costanza Cucchi shows cultural traits of BELF on national company websites in English by assembling four national BELF corpora and analyzing them with reference to Hofstede’s cultural model.

Corporate websites are also examined by Franca Poppi who underlines the importance of being “above all intelligible to other non-native speakers” (410) when companies portray their corporate identity through the medium of their websites. Her study exemplifies diverse strategies and degrees of accommodation for the successful ELF translation of local and culturally loaded terms.

Further education is the focus of Lanxi Hu’s contribution in a country where the belief in conforming to native English still prevails (432). She takes a look at English-medium instruction as a move towards the internationalization of Chinese universities with the aim of attracting both national and international students.

Staying in academia, Jennifer Schluer delineates a workshop focusing on cultural awareness (CA) in research, publications and presentations across all academic disciplines. She points to the widely held assumption that good academic writing is viewed as that of a NS and therefore ‘standard’ (448) and explicates misunderstandings that can occur from culture-specific conventions as language is never void of culture (Baker 2015).

Alan Thompson rounds off the contributions by looking at cultural factors which determine a participant’s role in an ELF discussion - dominating or peripheral - and how this correlates to the choice of epistemic and attitudinal markers. By observing practices in naturally occurring speech he highlights the need for



pedagogical materials to include the flexible use of language and cultural skills involved in negotiating meaning and roles in ELF.

The book furthers ELF research by reaching out and exploring the nexus between language and culture in a number of diverse fields range from English language teaching, teacher education, English mediated instruction, to technology, business communication, pragmatics and sociolinguistics. Together they reflect the dynamic and fluid nature of ELF which is adapted according to the needs of the communicative situation and the participants, proof as Seidlhofer (2011; 77) says, that ELF “is not a variety of English but a variable way of using it.” Encouragingly much of the research points to a positive perception of ELF among non-linguists and a decreasing concern with the need to conform to native speaker (NS) norms for some of those whose main focus of study or work lies with languages. It is a valuable contribution exploring inextricable link between language and and culture providing insight for language pedagogy and inspiration for further research.

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