
This book could be seen as an early representative of a mature phase of ELF studies, in which the validity of ELF usage is well enough established for the focus to be on dispassionate investigation rather than advocacy. It is based on the million-word Helsinki ELFA corpus of academic speech in English produced (mainly) by speakers with a different home language. The author’s wide reading, clear vision, and rational approach make it an exceptionally valuable book, not only within ELF studies but in terms of a number of general issues raised. Mauranen sets the discussion of SLU (second language use) in the context of established studies of translation studies, second language acquisition, spoken language, language change and language processing and presents empirical findings with implications for all these areas and for language teaching.

The focus of Mauranen’s branch of ELF studies has been on ‘non-native’ speakers with a good education and extensive exposure in school and elsewhere to at least written Standard English. That is to say, this ELF is not the ELF of the streets of Johannesburg or Lagos. One part of Mauranen’s project is to find out what distinguishes this sort of ELF from the sort of English spoken by comparably educated and literate ‘native’ speakers. Spoken ELF is known to differ from the written norm of Standard English as enforced by publishers and schools in a number of ways, but the issue here is how it differs from spoken ENL (English as a Native Language, Mauranen’s acronym), as used by speakers of the standard dialect. The advantage of choosing the academic environment for ELFA is that an academic environment in the US is similar in sociolinguistic and genre/register terms. The ENL spoken there is not the ENL of the streets of Chicago or Manchester. The therefore Mauranen can compare ELF with John Swales’ MICASE corpus of spoken interaction (REF) with some confidence that the differences are due to the proportion of ENL users among the speakers.

After an introduction Mauranen presents a magisterial chapter called ‘Three perspectives on ELF’, based on earlier work by a range of ELF scholars as well as her own ELA studies. This chapter seems to resolve the question of whether ELF is a situation or a code, in that draws on very wide reading to consider how the situation of production might affect the code. The first perspective is the macrosocial, characterizing the communities in which academic ELF is produced as mobile, weakly linked, impermanent and ambiguous between endonormativity and exonormativity. The ELF environment shows ‘second-order hybridization, in that ELF results not from contacts between different languages, but from contacts between ‘similects’, that is varieties of English influenced by different first languages. In this context, changes in the code may be expected. From the sociolinguistic literature, Mauranen predicts that there will be simplification – reduction of irregularity, perhaps -- and leveling, in the form of increased use of unmarked forms. Somewhat similarly, frequent forms will be preserved, infrequent ones altered. Mauranen argues that ELF-induced change may be stabilized and visible in ‘English’, by which she may mean the general standard dialect, in sixty or seventy years. She does not say this but one can imagine ELF rivalling US English as a source of innovations, once it has itself stabilized.

The second perspective is the cognitive. The grammar of any spoken language is organized to facilitate on-line processing, but ELF is, by definition, not a speaker’s first-acquired language. ELF speakers have had less exposure and the code is therefore less entrenched; repertoires are more limited and processing is more difficult. The dysfluencies that are frequent in first-language speech
may be expected to be even more common in ELF. In this context one may ask how far ELF speakers store multi-word units like “ENL” speakers, and to what extent they have to construct phrases from basic building blocks. Mauranen notes that given the processing difficulty of using a second language one can expect approximation, that is the production of a form often recognizably and comprehensibly like the standard, but not precise (say comments rather than make comments). This cognitive perspective justifies the otherwise rather strange focus in ELF studies on whether one is a biographical native speaker of English rather than whether English is the best language one has for the context or domain in question.

The third perspective is microsocial, going from the interactional form to code implications. ELF is mainly exemplified in cooperative interaction, and it can be shown that interactants accommodate to each other and agree locally on forms, thus making it possible that innovations are adopted in one context and gradually spread to another. it is generally agreed that another characteristic of ELF due to the microsocial context in which it is produced is explicitation; on the other hand Mauranen questions the idea that ELF in the sophisticated environments of the ELFA corpus is discourse is highly content-oriented to the extent of lacking hedges and facework.

Chapter 3 describes ELFA. As readers of this journal will be aware, it is a million-word corpus of spoken ELF from Finnish academic contexts, covering an appropriate variety of genres (a majority interactive) and disciplines. A quarter of the speakers are Finns, 5% native speakers of English (in non-dominant roles) and a proportion are outer-circle users (treated as native speakers of Kikuyu, Bengali etc.). All recordings are of sessions where speakers have different home languages.

Chapter 4 looks at vocabulary in in MICASE and ELFA, and the general theme is that both the codes used and the processing inferred from them are rather similar. A comparison of MICASE and ELFA with the Brown corpus in terms of frequency patterns shows that MICASE is much more like ELFA than like Brown; the processing implications of medium (speech vs writing) are much more important than those of nativeness. In terms of types of lexical items, MICASE is richer than ELFA: so there is simplification in ELF, as predicted, but there are similar proportions of functional classes of word in the two samples. Even at the detailed level of predicative and attributive use of words like significant and important, patterns are remarkably similar. Mauranen finds that there is indeed formal and semantic approximation in ELFA, including a tendency for ELF to use more general words (as noted for translationese).

Chapter 5 deals broadly with syntactic structure and starts with a valuable discussion of the relation of SLA studies to the ‘SLU’ of which ELF studies are a part. Mauranen shows that the syntactic differences between MICASE and ELFA are roughly what one would expect from previous work. Though speakers ‘follow the general lines of standard grammars’ (137), there is divergence ‘in almost every conversational turn’. Weak entrenchment of the ELF forms leads to variability in ELF speech, although the variations are directional – divergences in one direction are often much more common than in another. From this she infers that while it is necessary for language produced to be reasonably predictable – and hence close to a norm – in order to limit processing difficulties, minor deviations (approximations) do not interfere with processing. Another consequence of weak entrenchment, however, the high frequency of hesitation and repetition, may, it is suggested, actually make the message less concentrated and easier to understand.
In a most interesting section of this chapter, Mauranen examines ‘multi-word wholes’ and finds, broadly speaking, that they are extremely common in SLU (contrary to some speculation) and that approximate realizations are also very common. As usual, the repertoire is rather narrower in ELFA than in MICASE, but the categories and their proportions are the same—in terms for example of vagueness. Since some of the approximations are shared, “ELF speech is .... converging on new preferences” (159).

Chapter 6 investigates discourse explicitness. The thrust here and in the next chapter is both to focus on code similarities or differences between ELFA and MICASE and to show that a full range of pragmatic or discourse functions is available to and used by ELF speakers. This is amply demonstrated by examples showing careful discourse management, which may be especially necessary in an environment with uncertain common background and linguistic knowledge. An investigation of self-rephrase markers shows that they are three times more frequent in ELFA and heavily concentrated on the form I mean, as compared with MICASE. This conforms the picture of skilled, even extra-explicit, discourse using different repertoire of forms. The forms of discourse markers in general are sometimes different between the corpora, because of approximation and variability in ELFA, but there is also evidence of developing specific systematicity in ELF.

Chapter 7 investigates the various functions of repetition and rephrasing in spoken language as a whole and in spoken ELF. ‘Repeats’ of exactly the same item are, like filled pauses, more frequent in ELFA, and as they are viewed as indications of planning or word-choice difficulty, they reflect the greater difficulty of second-language processing (while at the same time giving the interlocutor time to process). Self-rephrasing for clarification or repair, on the other hand, is about equally common in the two corpora, but in ELFA it is more frequently adjustment of form. Echoing—repeating someone else’s words—is also frequent and this is taken as further evidence of the explicit and cooperative nature of ELF interaction on the microsocial level.

Chapter 8 is a conclusion making valuable proposals for adapting English language teaching to the lingua-franca and drawing attention to the increasingly anachronistic forms and criteria of English-language tests. Mauranen also draws attention to possible implications in translation, interpreting academic publishing, and editing/language-checking. In this conclusion Mauranen compares ELF with some monolithic Standard English and finds it similar but characteristically different. It seems to me that the World Englishes tradition is the one relevant field that Mauranen has not drawn on adequately, and that its vision of multiple (spoken) standard varieties would be useful here. The type of ELF she has investigated might be best viewed as a variety of Standard English, as yet only definable by context, but with developing code features. Its variability and the frequency of approximate and new collocations it make it similar to Indian Standard English or another internationally comprehensible standard version of the ‘New Englishes’, This would enable us to distinguish between Lingua Franca Standard English and the wide range of local non-standard lingua franca varieties not to be found in seminar rooms.

By summarizing previous work and reporting new findings, this volume sets out a framework for ELF studies which makes it possible for them to draw on and contribute to a wide range of other fields. Any scholar interested in contemporary English internationally needs to read it.