The (ir)relevance of English as a lingua franca for language practitioners

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Outline

- English as a lingua franca
  - ELFy English?
  - Does it really work?
  - What counts as valid English?
- Challenges and implications

- Hundreds of millions of English speakers worldwide
- Recent estimate: five non-native English speakers for every native speaker (Crystal 2012 in Albl-Mikasa 2013: 4)

English as a lingua franca (ELF)

- English used for communication among speakers who do not share an L1
- Essentially a multilingual practice:
  - Mostly multilingual ELF users
  - Environments where ELF is spoken are usually multilingual
  - "English as a Multilingua Franca" (Jenkins 2015: 73) where English is seen as one of the speakers' resources in multilingual communication

➤ What does this mean for English?

ELFy English?

- What makes speech recognisably ELF?
  - Pronunciation
  - Minor infelidities in form (e.g. approximations, rephrasings, non-standard syntax)
  - Apparent dysfluences in execution (e.g. repeats, hesitations, pauses)
  - Standard forms most common but more variability overall compared to English as a native language (ENL)

(Mauranen 2012)

→ Grammatically simple?

- Structural simplification occurs, particularly regularised morphology
- But simplicity is not straightforward:
  - Wider, but not random, variability in comparison to ENL (incl. ELF-specific developments e.g. in phraseology)
  - Non-standard features not necessarily simple
  - Far greater structural variation compared to ENL → weaker structural entrenchment
  - Affinities with non-standard dialect features and with World Englishes

(Mauranen 2012)

→ Lexically complex?

- Neologisms and approximations
- But: the most frequent words proportionally even more frequent than in ENL
  - Language contact strengthens core vocabulary at the expence of rarer words
  - May retain equal or greater variability among rare lexical words

(Mauranen 2012)

→ Enhanced explicitness

- E.g. metadiscourse, anticipatory markers of local organisation and rephrasing are all prominent characteristics of ELF
  - facilitate negotiation for interpretations
  - make processing a more palatable task

(Mauranen 2012)

Does it really work?

- Success seen relative to context vs. pre-existing standards
- Successful in that
    - mutual understanding is achieved
    - speakers have been able to express themselves to their satisfaction (see Albl-Mikasa 2014a)

- ELF research findings show:
    - Although speakers may have misgivings about their own abilities, generally works (see Albl-Mikasa 2014a)
    - Few misunderstandings (e.g. Mauranen 2006; Kaur 2009)
    - Cooperative use of linguistic means of expression and communicative strategies (e.g. Seidlhofer 2009; Björkman 2011), including accommodation and acting as intermediary

→ Example of acting as an intermediary in ELF interaction

Discussion after student (S7) presentation in the field of forestry: mediation (BS2: student, L1s West African English and Twi; T1: teacher and course leader, L1 Finnish; S7: student, L1 Catalan; T2: teacher, L1s Swedish and Finnish;)

BS2:   [er] i would like the sp- the speaker to er (in) his own er suggestion how to deal with the constraints (of these worms and er maize diseases)

T1:   er

S7:   excuse me [(xx)]

T1:   **[in what] sense**

T2:   **(he asked) how to control the pests**

BS2:   pest an-

S7:   how to control

T2:   [yeah]

BS2:   [and] diseases

S7:   mhm (e- w- with) (xx) mhm erm mono- monogrowth is is very very difficult to control the (the) (xx) and the insects because the growth of the insects increase exponentially but in if i think if there are a mixed er crops i- is better and the biological control is i think i- is possible

T2:   and it's correctly er emphasised that this is a serious ((…))

(Hynninen 2013)

→ Implications

- The intermediary example highlights skills required from a "good communicator" (Mauranen 2012: 239) in today's world
  - Ability to decipher messages delivered in various kinds of Englishes
  - Ability to accommodate one's own delivery of the messages to a specific audience

What counts as valid English...

- Codified norms of English are likely to influence not only our perceptions of English but also our English use
  - "Standard language ideology" and the belief in correctness of certain forms over others (Milroy 2001)
  - Uniformity of form

- But as a consequence of mobility, more and more language will appear "non-standard" (Blommaert 2010):
  - Not because of careless speakers
  - But because of the complex play of "truncated multilingualism", and the differences in access to resources

- Also, standard and non-standard forms are not markedly differentiated in ELF interaction (Mauranen 2012):
  - e.g. approximations: as *the* matter of fact, *on* my point of view
  - e.g. accommodation to / adoption of another speaker's form:

Student group work: study case vs. case study (S2: L1 Brazilian Portuguese; NS3: Am. English)

S2:   <FIRST NAME NS3> do you think we need to to find more information about the traditional methods or it's okay from this **study case**,

NS3:   er, i think it will maybe be okay from the **study case** i can maybe do some explaining er a little further than what the **study case** says

S2:   mhm-hm

NS3:   but i think they'll mention maybe some traditional previously at least traditional methods as well so

(Hynninen 2013)

→ salience, memorability and interactional meaningfulness will determine what forms will be preferred (Mauranen 2012)

… for actual speakers in specific circumstances of ELF use?

- How do speakers regulate language, that is, monitor and intervene in their own or each other's language use?
  - How relevant are established language policies and standards for speakers in specific circumstances of ELF use?
  - What actually counts as "acceptable", "functional", "correct" English in ELF settings?

→ Speaker perceptions: example 1

Interview comment: on ELF interaction vs. talking to English native speakers (student, L1 Brazilian Portuguese)

((…)) but at the same time i feel that because here [Finland] it's not an english er country everybody speaks **a more or less correct english** and because everyone understand each other you don't pay attention that you are sometimes making some mistakes especially pronunciation or or some grammar mistakes but **everyone is understanding you** but when i had the chance to talk to somebody from america or from some other english-speaking country then i realise that i have bad english if i have to pronounce (ev-) everything correctly and try to make me er to to m- to make the other understand me well @@

- ENL seen as proper and correct => acceptable
- ELF seen as functional => acceptable

(Hynninen 2013)

→ Speaker perceptions: example 2

Interview comments: real vs. international English (student, L1 German)

((...)) it's not the real en- english that we speak we speak some some er **modified version** of it that kind of fits everyone's language level and like if <COUGH> yeah this is like what we do and the **real english** is somewhere there except for some exception some people speak it very fluently but most of us don't

i think **we already have an international english** and erm, it is probably, er, (is it inevitable) not it's not po- well it is **the only way it can er it can be used** because i mean we all we won't be able to speak like an english english native speaker if we don't live in the country or study it ((...))

- ENL seen as the correct way to use English, but ELF reality as something where this kind of correctness is not relevant
- From the perspective of a native English speaker, ELF appears to degrade English vs. from the perspective of a non-native English speaker, ELF is "what we do"

(Hynninen 2013)

→ Speaker perceptions: conclusions

- Experiences of using ELF influence user views:
  - More experience equals more relaxed attitudes towards non-standardness
  - At least for spoken English, "acceptable" is not the same as "correct"

                                                                    (Hynninen 2013)

- Who users compare their English with influences their views: what counts as "good" English is relative to the context in which the language is used

                                                              (Pilkinton-Pihko 2013)

→ Regulation in interaction: example

Discussion after student (S8) presentation in the field of forestry: Sudan vs. the Sudan (T2: teacher, L1s Swedish and Finnish; T1: teacher and course leader, L1 Finnish; BS2: L1s West African English and Twi)

T2: could we take a few language questions here

T1: yes please

T2: er er <FIRST NAME S8> **correctly** used the the th- th- the name of the country as the sudan remember that this is the the name of the country the sudan like the gambia ((...))

<TURNS OMITTED>

T2: ((...)) but er gambia it's because the river **rivers always have the** so that follows a- and sudan it there was something similar it was the sud was th- the wet area and then the sudan came from the sud probably this is the <T1> [mhm yeah okay] </T1> [explanation] this is my my my understanding but it's also correct to say without the [nowadays] <S2> [mhm-hm] </S2> **especially in scientific contexts** </T2>

(Hynninen 2012, 2013)

→ Regulation in interaction: implications

- In the example:
  - Explicit regulation of student's grammar by a teacher (*could we take a few language questions*, *correctly used*)
  - Not only reproduction of codified English native language norms, rather, alternative sources for norm construction (grammar rules vs. scientific contexts)

- Non-native English speakers act as language regulators in ELF interaction (Hynninen 2012, 2013; see also Smit 2010) vs. L1–L2 interaction where corrections done by L1 speakers (e.g. Kurhila 2006)
- Implies reduced importance of native vs. non-native speaker roles and increased importance of novice vs. expert roles (Hynninen 2013; Mauranen 2014)

(Hynninen 2012, 2013)

Challenges in ELF communication

- To understand what is valid English **when and where** → What is acceptable in one context may not be acceptable in another
  - Sometimes not conforming (or being able to conform) to ENL norms may result in labelling a speaker an inadequate learner of English (see Cook 2012)
  - Sometimes non-standard is what is expected (regional dialects, slang etc.)
  - Sometimes a departure from ENL norms may enhance communication:

    Interview comment: Chinese grammar (teacher, L1s Swedish and Finnish)

    there is also this that the Chinese person does not understand what I say and it has to be changed to this kind of simple language in speech or use Chinese grammar in the English language <IR-1> (ah) @@ </IR-1> before he understands

    (Hynninen 2013)

Challenges for ELF research

- To understand the **layerdness** of language regulation and how the different layers influence users in specific circumstances
- E.g. regulation potentially relevant for a scholar writing a research article include at least
    - university language policy: language choice?
    - journal guidelines: Standard AmE/BrE?
    - disciplinary and genre conventions
    - a colleague's language commentary
    - feedback from language revision services
    - feedback from journal editors and reviewers
    - personal preferences

Challenges for ELF research cont.

- So what kind of regulation is relevant in what circumstances and for what kinds of speech/texts?
  - "Acceptable" user ELF may or may not be the same thing as "good" edited ELF
  - The applicational challenge for written ELF research is in "highlighting and providing practical examples of the positive features of ELF that counter negative assumptions of its linguistic 'poverty' relative to native English" (Owen 2011: 295)

➢ The layerdness of language regulation will be investigated in the Language Regulation in Academia (LaRA) project (http://www.helsinki.fi/project/lara), director Anna Solin

Challenges for mediated communication

- Diversity of ELF source speech/text can impede **comprehension**: more difficult e.g. for interpreters to rely on well-established automatisms and routine inference processes (Albl-Mikasa 2013) → exposure, raising awareness

- Further development of strategies that help deal with **transfer** phenomena (see Albl-Mikasa 2013 on suggestions for interpreter training: evasion, don't panic, substitution)

- Taking ELF audience into account in one's **production**: not necessarily translating/interpreting "into ELF", but ELF-appropriate accommodation strategies

(see Albl-Mikasa 2013)

A new role for language practitioners?

- The use of ELF highlights the importance of English-language practitioners as professionals who
  - can decipher messages delivered in various kinds of Englishes
  - can accommodate their own delivery of the messages to various kinds of audiences, whether ENL or ELF
  - can possibly "act not only as a neutral voice, but as a clarifier for interlocutors who might be increasingly less capable of coming to grips with diversity-shaped speech output" (Albl-Mikasa 2014a: 35)

# A new role for language practitioners? cont.

- In effect, we are talking about a "good communicator of the future, a plurilingual, adaptive, effective speaker" (Mauranen, 2012: 240) who
  - knows how to mediate between mobile multilinguals
  - knows what is communicatively effective in specific circumstances

A new role for language practitioners? cont.

- Requires heightened sensibility
  - to variation in the source texts/speech
  - to understanding the target audience and its needs

- ELF research continues to shed light on
  - what kind of variation to expect (e.g. phraseological approximations, narrower core vocabulary yet variability in rare lexical words etc.)
  - what is understandable to an international audience (e.g. what kind of accommodation is effective: increasing explicitness)
  - what for (multilingual) ELF users counts as 'acceptable', 'functional' or indeed 'correct' English

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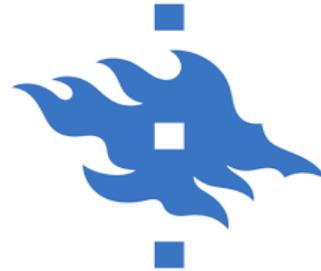
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