



English as a Lingua Franca

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What is it?

English as a lingua franca (ELF) is a functional term referring to the use of English as a common language by speakers of different first languages. English today is used far more by its non-native speakers than native speakers. It is undeniably the only global lingua franca used in a wide variety of international domains, including international business, banking, higher education, politics, technology and media. In this sense, English has reached truly global dimensions no other language has come near. This also means that English is in constant contact with the other languages in the world, subsequently causing change and variation in the English language. We know from research that there are a number of non-standard morphosyntactic commonalities in ELF usage (which are not simply first language transfer), and that those who use ELF employ a rich repertoire of strategies to communicate effectively.

Who uses the concept?

The notion of English as a lingua franca is interesting for theoretical, descriptive and applied purposes. So far, it has been used mostly by applied linguists who have studied it in a number of domains, primarily in academia and international business. Its use, however, is not limited to applied linguistics. This complex phenomenon can be approached from a variety of fields, such as contact linguistics, second language acquisition (SLA), sociolinguistics, bilingualism, multilingualism, and typology, as well as the general field of English language teaching (ELT). In addition, policy makers from different domains use the term in language management and planning purposes.

Fit with intercultural dialogue?

The term ELF is particularly relevant to intercultural dialogue when speakers from different cultures use English as a tool for communication. Although speakers in ELF settings have no shared cultural membership or identity, they always have a common communicative goal, which in turn creates a strong orientation to mutual comprehensibility. ELF settings are by their very nature diverse, with speakers acknowledging each other's differences. When using English as the lingua franca, most speakers express a preference for using English in a way that shows their identity, instead of conforming to native speaker standards.

What work remains?

In today's world where English is increasingly being used as the vehicular language, it is important not only to continue examining high-stakes domains such as academia and international business, but also to go beyond these already extensively studied domains and consider other, non-elite domains.

Resources

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