

Book Review

English as a Lingua Franca in Higher Education: A longitudinal study of classroom discourse

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This book sets out to bridge the research gap in the emergent literature on classroom discourse by analyzing ‘*English as a lingua franca*’ (ELF) as a new linguistic form of instruction in European tertiary education. ELF as defined by Seidlhofer (2005) is “communication in English between speakers with different first languages” (p. 339). The primary focus of the book is to report on a research study which analyzes the language functions and features in classroom interactions of a group of international teachers and students in a two-year full time Hotel Management Programme (HMP) in a tertiary institution in Vienna, Austria. The book aims to study “discourse-pragmatic ethnography within an interactional tertiary educational programme, focusing on classroom interaction in English as a lingua franca” (p. 8). One of the unique features of the study is the multiplicity of analytical approaches to the investigation of classroom language in use, including but not limited to classroom discourse analysis, ethnography of communication, sociolinguistics, spoken discourse analysis and systemic functional linguistics. This study is distinctive from other ELF studies in terms of its longitudinal nature capturing the development of the use of ELF in classroom interactions.

The book is divided into eight chapters. The first chapter previews the rationale for undertaking the research and introduces the overall research objectives. It is clear that the conceptual framework of Smit’s work is underpinned by the two major principles of ‘*Community of Practice*’, the principle of explicitness and the principle of joint forces (Wenger, 1998). Chapter Two highlights key terms, addresses conceptual considerations relating to ELF, reviews current trends and major findings in ELF research and identifies main investigative principles and focus of the study. Chapter Three gives an account of the research design and justifies the methodological choices of a longitudinal study. Chapter Four systematically discusses the ethnographical account of the study site. Chapters Five, Six and Seven critically examine the interactional analysis of HMP classroom talk, while the final chapter of the book synthesizes the significant findings and relates them to a wider perspective of classroom language studies. In particular, the major results are brought together to delineate how the subjects co-construct their understanding, co-direct talk and social players, and co-explain knowledge within their classroom community of practice. It also evaluates the theoretical underpinnings of the research and concludes with recommendations for further studies.

The foremost pedagogical contribution of the research reported in this book is the provision of a useful methodology to studies of theoretical development of ELF in higher education. One point to note is that ELF is characterized by the fluidity of form in measuring a speaker’s competence in English because “there is no a priori grammar”

(Canagarajah, 2007, p. 927) and "...form gets shaped according to the contexts and participants in an interaction" (Canagarajah, 2007, p. 928). In other words, in an ELF context English is used only as a tool which allows speakers who do not share a common mother tongue to achieve communicative purposes (Björkman, 2008). This characteristic of ELF may pose a problem in a context which is more intellectually and academically oriented than the one being examined in this research because of the notion of 'comparative fallacy' as explained by Cook (1999), which refers to the vacuum created by the lack of a standard norm to follow. The purpose of using English within a context as such goes beyond simply attaining shared understanding between interlocutors who are non-native speakers of the language. The absence of a standard of reference may create confusion to the understanding of and beliefs in what constitute 'academic English'.

The author shows delicacy in framing her research. The ethnic and cultural diversity of subjects provides an ideal platform for analyzing the interplay of various cultural and linguistic forces which operate at different stages of the study. The author carefully makes her analysis specific enough to counsel care in generalizing, and this leads to her conclusion in chapter Eight which encourages the use of ELF in different educational settings as the basis for comparative studies. To expand the current findings to a wider dataset, the conceptual framework of the existing study can be transferred to other university programmes with multilingual speakers, such as programmes in higher education in Asian contexts (English as an Asian Lingua Franca). This would help create a wider picture of the research topic, diversify data sources and subsequently increase the validity of the research findings.

This book, as a comprehensive inquiry into a range of fundamental issues in ELF from the perspectives of multiple analytical frameworks in the era of globalization, will benefit anyone who wishes to be informed on the use of ELF in classroom discourse in a globally-oriented service industry. It further opens up innovative perspectives on research relating to classroom interactions in higher educational settings and provides theoretical insights for English language pedagogy.

About the reviewers

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