

Book Review

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Motschenbacher, Heiko. 2013. New Perspectives on English as a European Lingua Franca. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company. ISBN 97890 272 7099.

English as a lingua franca (ELF) has been widely accepted by many researchers as a perspective of viewing the global spread of English. This book studies European ELF for particular and aims to record the hybridity, or “internally heterogeneous formation” (p. 2) as the author explains, of European ELF within a community of practice where “Europeanness” is expressed during the use of English. Introduction of the book is presented in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 discusses different paradigms for the study of English in Europe. Chapter 3 deals with methodological framework of this book. The following four chapters are the empirical sections. They study European ELF from four linguistic levels: language choice (Chapter 4), metalinguistic comments (Chapter 5), pragmatic behaviors (Chapter 6) and linguistic structures (Chapter 7). Chapter 8 provides a summary and overall analysis of the previous chapters.

Chapter 2 introduces four major views on the spread of English in Europe: linguistic imperialism, World Englishes, ELF and the postmodern conceptualization of English. Motschenbacher considers the first two approaches inappropriate to describe English in Europe since the former impedes deeper levels of Europeanization and the latter fails to improve non-native speakers’ situation. Though ELF paradigm shares a number of common features with the World Englishes paradigm, difference exists since ELF focuses on diversity and creativity within language based on functions and local contexts. ELF paradigm also takes in ideas from postmodernist approach. The postmodernist conceptualization of English abandons the modern conception of languages as systems and considers them as “discursive formations evolving in language use” (p. 29). This book is based on the latter two approaches because they are “relatively silent on the connection between ELF and matters of Europeanness” (p. 31). Here Europeanness is explained as “belonging” (p. 200), referring to speakers’ willingness to be part of Europe. This book thus explores how European ELF interacts with Europeanness.

Chapter 3 deals with the methodological framework of this book. The concept “community of practice” is chosen as the framework since it enables the researcher to observe from a micro perspective and focus on subtle linguistic differences. “Community of practice” refers to a group of people who share a

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common goal and join in common activities (Lave & Wenger 1991). It is distinguished from the traditional notion of “speech community” (Gumperz 1968) that emphasizes a common language. Talks on Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) press conference 2010 are transcribed to texts. Extractions from the transcription are studied, with either qualitative or quantitative approach or both of them. ESC press conference is such a community of practice because people speaking different European languages as their L1 establish a temporary community by coming together for the common purpose of discussing music or related issues.

Detailed study is carried out in Chapter 4-7 through discourse and structural analysis of the transcription. Chapter 4 takes a qualitative look at the choice of languages at ESC press conference on both macro and micro levels, underlining the pragmatic functions of non-English languages within ELF talk. On the macro level, the switching of language happens when the speaker starts another sentence or another speaker takes the floor. While on the micro level, English is the dominant language with only a few words spoken in other European languages. The switch of languages on both levels demonstrates that English in this context is not valued by nativeness but used to serve the purpose of facilitating communication and weakening speakers’ connections with their national countries.

Chapter 5 complements Chapter 4 by analyzing in detail the comments on linguistic practices given by the conference participants themselves. Objects being commented can be classified into three categories: code choices, English proficiency and non-native English accents. Speakers are explicitly asked to speak English, but their English proficiency is not perceived as important. Because in this community of practice, English is not valued for its native-likeness, but for its function to improve communicative efficiency. The study also shows that comments on non-native accents are positive compared with those on native accents. Speaking with a native accent would probably be perceived as divergence from the community. Moreover, the author views speakers’ positive attitudes on their own accents as a sign suggesting ELF-oriented discourses, which value communicative success over native-likeness, are gaining more ground.

In Chapter 6, further analysis on pragmatic linguistic level is conducted to explore features of compliments used in European ELF. The aspect of compliments is chosen because the author believes it displays positive politeness, which is fundamental to the building of solidarity in European ELF communication contexts. Four aspects concerning compliments are discussed in this chapter including frequency, structures, functions and sociolinguistic aspects. Results show that although generally compliments are highly frequent, hybridity exists in distribution of frequencies and syntactic patterns across different national delegations. However, all the compliments cohere with the same function. Conference members use them strategically to create solidarity across national boundaries.

Chapter 7 focuses on the structural level of European ELF, based on quantitative analyses of relativisation. Relativisers used by European ELF speakers are different from those of native speakers. This, in many researches, may be treated as either the deficient side of non-native speakers (traditional ELT position) or one of the identifications for being a variety (World Englishes position). But this book denies both positions. On the one hand, the different usages of relativisers do not impede successful communication. Therefore, they

are not deficient expressions judging from the European ELF perspective. On the other hand, Motschenbacher argues that the choice of relativisers is affected by a range of factors, which may not be adequately explained by descriptions of being an English variety. Furthermore, the diversity of relativisation is inadequate to be treated as one of the European ELF features since the usage of relativisers only slightly diverges from that of native speakers. Therefore, the author concludes that European ELF is neither an English variety, nor is it different from native English systematically on the structural dimension.

Chapter 8 offers a comprehensive discussion on various linguistic levels studied in preceding chapters, underlining three aspects: the conceptualizing of European ELF, relationship between European ELF and Europeanness, and implications for ELF-oriented European language policies. ELF is different from traditional concepts of English in that, instead of being a stable language system, it is featured with “internal hybridity” (p. 54) and can adjust itself according to different functions or by absorbing local languages. In the community of ESC press conference studied in this book, European ELF takes on the identity value of Europeanness. That is to say, people at the conference, being native or non-native speakers of English, speak English to show their willingness to belong to Europe by weakening their associations with national countries, or “tone down their national affiliations” (p. 76). This requires European language policy makers recognize the existence of European ELF and its hybridity, instead of treating native English as the only model for English learning.

This book stands out for two main points. Firstly, it abandons the traditional concept of “English” and “community”. English used in Europe is considered as a lingua franca and the notion of “community of practice” is developed. While House (2003) recommends the concept of “community of practice” as the basis for ELF research and “hybridity” as ELF norm, this book develops this idea and carries out an empirical study into different linguistic levels of actual European ELF talk within a specific community of practice taking place in Europe. The idea of Europeanness is brought up, which is thought to have played a crucial role in the shaping of European ELF in this particular community of practice. It’s safe to say this book opens the door to empirical study of ELF in specific contexts. Secondly, this book makes the study of the global spread of English practical by leading language policy makers to follow the implication of its research. It calls for the recognition of ELF in Europe and suggests European language policy makers find implication from European ELF. It also offers constructive suggestions on English language teaching. Overall, this book makes a great contribution to empirical study in the field of ELF research, and sets a good example for latter researches to follow.

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