

## DISCOURSE REFLEXIVITY AND INTERNATIONAL SPEAKERS – HOW IS IT USED IN ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA?

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English has become the global language of science and scholarship, used overwhelmingly by non-native speakers. This makes English as a lingua franca (ELF) an intriguing area of research into variation and change: when one language is in contact with virtually any other language in the world, what happens to this language? Discourse features are a case in point: we may assume that discourse reflexivity increases in lingua franca use. It makes discourse more explicit, which is important in multicultural encounters. This paper explores discourse reflexivity in the speech of people using English as a lingua franca in university settings. Findings suggest that reflexive functions and discourse collocations operate in ELF in a similar way to L1 English. Differences appear at a more subtle level of form-function relationships: in ELF speech, forms were often approximate rather than accurate, some form-function pairings were ignored, and some specific, minor functions of certain expressions were not used.

### 1. Introduction

English is unquestionably the global language of science and scholarship. Academia is one of the domains which have most enthusiastically embraced English as their common language in international communication. The adoption of English has been particularly rapid since the Second World War, after which English has dominated research publishing. Although neither academic mobility nor the existence of an academic lingua franca are new phenomena, the present scale of mobility and the global dominance of English are unprecedented.

Like other varieties of English, academic registers are overwhelmingly used by non-native speakers, which has raised new questions regarding the appropriate use of English: are we facing an enormous struggle in trying to bring a notable part of the world to speak English in a way which is as close as possible modelled on current native speaker norms, or do we take the lead from English as it stands – an international means of communication? In either case it is important to consider carefully the kinds of norms that we want to adopt as the basis of teaching and testing, and in each case, it is reasonable to take ‘good users’ as the standard.

Whichever way we want to approach teaching, from a scholarly point of view the worldwide use of English as a lingua franca (ELF) is a fascinating area of linguistic variation and change. When virtually any language in the world is in contact with one language, what happens to the language as a result of such multiple contacts? How do the commonly found tendencies and mechanisms of language contact manifest

themselves in such a situation? Earlier research into language contact tends to focus on relatively stable contacts between two languages. Most language contact is characterised by ‘imperfect learning’ (which I prefer to call ‘variable’ rather than imperfect, though, see Mauranen 2003b). As for example Thomason (2001:75) points out, imperfect learning tends to cause structural or phonological rather than lexical changes in the target language, and more often than not it leads to simplification rather than complexification of the target language structure. However, even though syntax, lexis and phonology have been relatively widely studied in language contact research, much less is known about pragmatic, discourse structural and phraseological changes. What discourse features are affected by language contact and in which way – are there discourse features which are accidental rather than universal, and can these be dispensed with in communication which seeks efficiency but not native-likeness, because neither communicating party is a native speaker? For instance, are discourse markers universal, and therefore always present in communication? And is discourse reflexivity, the capacity of language to talk about itself, among ‘necessary features of language’, to use Hunston and Francis’s (1999) term?

Although not much empirical research has been carried out on ELF, there has been lively discussion (see, e.g. Seidlhofer 2004) and the field has begun to find its feet since the turn of the millennium. Jenkins’s (2000) seminal work on English phonology in contexts of international communication among non-native speakers was the first major description of ELF as a kind of language use in its own right rather than as a deficient form of English. Jenkins’s study was preceded by a few pragmatic studies of ELF (e.g., Firth 1996; Firth and Wagner 1997; Meierkord 1998), and research into pragmatics has continued strong (e.g. House 2002; Lesznyák 2004; Mauranen 2006a; and several papers in Mauranen and Metsä-Ketelä (eds) 2006). Attitudes towards ELF have been charted (e.g. Erling 2004, Ranta 2004, Jenkins 2007), and its status as a variety of English has been critically investigated (Mollin 2006). A few papers in Knapp and Meierkord’s *Lingua Franca Communication* (2002) were also concerned with English. Most of the early work has been based on small amounts of data, and some of it on simulated situations. However, new databases pave the way to a greater variety of approaches, and currently research groups are busy compiling ELF corpora, which enable larger-scale studies than hitherto.

In this paper I explore discourse reflexivity in the speech of people using English as a lingua franca in university settings. My data comes from the ELFA corpus (see Section 3 below), thus the approach is corpus-based.

## **2. Academic speaking and English as a lingua franca**

Clearly, ELF is a rich field for a variety of research interests. Why should we want to focus on speaking, and academic speaking in particular?

Spoken language plays a central role in language change, and, as is generally accepted among scholars of language, spoken interaction is the primary mode of language use. Despite its centrality, spoken language has been and continues to be a less tractable object of research than written language, and therefore much less studied. This is not particularly controversial among linguists, at least in principle. But why academic language?

One reason is the influentality and prestige of academic language. Academic ways of using language exert a strong normative influence on any standard language and other prestige varieties – a considerable number of influential people in many societies go through a university education (for example politicians, economists, media journalists and teachers). Universities thus transmit a fair proportion of language norms. Yet within academic communities we are used to thinking that the most valued, high-prestige genres are written: research articles and monographs. Why then academic speech?

For a linguist, or anyone else interested in understanding the communities of practice that we participate in as academics, analysing speaking is a key to making sense of academic discourses. To understand academia as an institution we require data from the talk that is taking place and shaping it as an institution. Talk is what we engage in to construct and maintain the institution and its structures (in a Giddensian sense, see, Giddens 1984), and it is through talk that we conduct our countless conferences, meetings, symposia, negotiations. Talk is largely the means by which we socialise new generations into academia and through it, into the professional world and its identities. We give lectures, interact with students in seminars, tutorials, supervision sessions, and in many other ways.

Academic discourses are also comparatively demanding and sophisticated, thereby offering more interesting material for linguistic research than simpler, stereotypical exchanges. In all, it is not surprising that we have been witnessing a growing interest in academic speaking.

For English as a lingua franca, academic discourses constitute a particularly relevant object of research: academic genres are not the product of any national speech community, and therefore not the exclusive property of any nation either. Academic genres are among the most international ones from their very beginnings. Scholars were internationally mobile as soon as the first universities were established, and the mobility we are currently experiencing is not really new at all. Nor is the use of a common lingua franca a change from mediaeval practices.

In view of the deeply rooted internationalism of scholarship and science, we can question attempts to impose the linguistic norms of any given national community on academic genres. Even if we use English in most international academic events, we do not speak the kind of English that its native speakers would know by virtue of being native speakers: English as it is used in academic contexts needs to be specifically learned quite independently of whether it is the speaker's first language, or second or third.

To put this in terms of socialisation: after primary socialisation, which children undergo in infancy and early childhood, and which largely takes place in the family, a person goes through secondary socialisation into new communities and institutions, such as school, adolescent groups, university, vocation, profession, groups sharing hobbies or interests. That is, people get socialised into a number of subcultures even within their national or regional cultures and their first languages. Academic communities socialise undergraduates, graduates, novice researchers, and new employees until they become full members of the relevant local and international

communities. This socialisation, to be successful, entails acquiring appropriate rhetoric, appropriate ways of using language and an array of conventions at all levels of language use, from terminologies and phraseologies to argumentation structures and genres.

This secondary socialisation, and the concomitant expansion of our linguistic repertoires, is not an inherent part of expanding our first language knowledge: first, a relatively small (though influential) proportion of an age cohort among native speakers of any language go through the academic grind. Secondly, an increasing number of people in the world experience their socialisation into tertiary education and beyond it in a foreign language, at the moment overwhelmingly in English. These are hardly insignificant tendencies in the use of the English language, and the academic world is an important domain of international English.

### **3. Discourse reflexivity – a central feature of academic language**

Discourse reflexivity, or discourse about discourse, has been subject to intensive study over the last fifteen years or so. It is not surprising it has interested scholars, because it manifests a fundamental feature of natural language: the capacity of talking about itself. It is ubiquitous in discourse, and we can posit that it is very likely to be a ‘discourse universal’, i.e. a discourse feature found in a very large number, perhaps all, languages. For most scholars, the term ‘metadiscourse’ is more familiar than ‘discourse reflexivity’ for referring to language about language or discourse about discourse. But the term ‘metadiscourse’ has been contested notably by Sinclair (2005) on the grounds that it is not external to discourse but part of it, and since I have also been using ‘text/discourse reflexivity’ for many years (see, Mauranen 1993a), I shall use it here.

Despite its ubiquity, discourse reflexivity also shows systematic variation: it is used in different ways in different genres (Crismore 1989) speech and writing (Luukka 1992, Mauranen 2001) different cultures (Mauranen 1993a, Bäcklund 1998), by learners and native speakers (Ädel 2006), and in different disciplines (Hyland 2000, 2005). Discourse reflexivity is simultaneously a prominent and an elusive feature of text: while many of its characteristic expressions (*as I mentioned before*) are easy to recognise and widely agreed on, there is no closed class of discourse reflexive items. Neither are the expressions similar in size, but range from single-word items (*first, now*) to longish phrases (*today we're gonna talk a little bit about*) or even paragraphs with a discourse reflexive function. Definitions, boundaries and categorisations vary from scholar to scholar, but on the whole, discourse reflexivity or metadiscourse is defined in functional rather than formal terms. The basic function is generally seen as organising, describing, and commenting on the ongoing discourse; in performing these acts, the speaker guides the hearer in interpreting the discourse.

Even though there is variation in conceptualisation, delimitation and even terminology, discourse reflexivity continues to interest scholars, as is evident by the appearance of two recent books on the subject: Hyland (2005) and Ädel (2006). A good deal of its interest value lies in its cultural and generic variability, and the consequent learning obstacle to second language users. It has gradually made its way to many ESP and EAP curricula, with the result that several studies have reported its overuse in L2 learners.

In organising and focusing the discourse the speaker can be seen as making it clear and accessible in a reader or hearer-friendly manner. On the other hand, discourse reflexivity can also be seen as imposing the speaker's point of view on the discourse, a way of imposing authority by giving hearers the limits of their interpretative freedom (Mauranen 2001). In an ongoing negotiation of space, the speaker's space increases as he or she employs discourse reflexivity, and the hearer's space is correspondingly reduced. This interpretation contrasts with the influential distinction between cultural preferences put forth by Hinds (1987), who suggested that in respect of their writing styles, cultures could be divided into “writer responsible” and “reader responsible”, depending on whose task it primarily is to ensure successful communication. We can, thus, alternatively see the issue in terms of whose point of view dominates in the interpretation of the discourse. This reflects a tension between clarity and interpretative freedom, restricted and unrestricted interpretation.

Insofar as discourse reflexivity is indispensable in communication, it should be present in any language formation, including English as a lingua franca. That is to say, it is a potential discourse universal, and indeed it has been attested in very many languages. English as a lingua franca cannot be expected to adhere to any particular cultural preferences. Even though written publications often go through editing cycles, which include native speaker checking, speaking is different. In spoken discourse, where meanings are negotiated in real time, current participants may have highly varied cultural backgrounds, which may be more or less unknown to their interlocutors. There is thus a strong element of unpredictability, which needs to be overcome when clarity and mutual intelligibility are to be secured. In the face of this diversity, participants' adaptive strategies must lean heavily on cooperation. Gaps in shared knowledge can be bridged by strategies of enhanced clarity and explicitness. Thus the demand for cooperativeness and explicitness can be expected to rise in comparison to stable local discourse or speech communities. Since one of the consequences of using discourse reflexive language is a rise in the level of explicitness (Mauranen 1993a, 1993b), we might hypothesise that ELF speakers make good use of discourse reflexivity in their mutual negotiation of meanings. On the whole, we would expect to find similar functions but partly different realisations of discourse reflexivity in ELF and L1English.

Below, I shall be illustrating the use of discourse reflexivity in spoken academic ELF as it manifests itself in the ELFA corpus. I shall be arguing that while the basic function of discourse reflexivity is clearly present in ELF, as expected, differences between ELF and L1English speakers can also be discerned at a more subtle level of form-function relationships. Subtler distinctions in form, or form-function relationships, get ignored, and forms tend to be approximate rather than accurate. Possible differences in discourse functions may also arise, as the findings below will very tentatively suggest.

#### **4. Research Material**

This study is based on a corpus of spoken ELF, the ELFA corpus (English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings: [www.uta.fi/laitokset/kielet/engf/research/elfa/](http://www.uta.fi/laitokset/kielet/engf/research/elfa/)), which has been compiled at the Universities of Tampere and Helsinki, with some data added from recordings at the Technological Universities in Helsinki and Tampere. The

corpus currently consists of roughly one million words, but since not all transcriptions have been re-checked and finalised, the database drawn on here is restricted to the finalised transcripts and comprises only about half of the whole corpus, that is, around half a million words.

All of the data is naturally-occurring discourse, recorded in authentic situations, and it consists of complete individual speech events. The compilation was based on “external” criteria, that is, not determined by language-internal considerations, but by socially-based recognition of the genres of the discourse communities. Native speakers of English are sometimes present (roughly 5% of the speakers); they have not been recorded giving monologues or playing dominant roles in dialogues like doctoral defences, but appear as participants in multi-party discussions. Altogether, the speakers represent more than 40 first language backgrounds. No sessions with speakers who all share a L1 are included, neither are courses where English is the object of study – English language courses have thus not been recorded.

The speech events cover many different kinds of university discourses: lectures, seminars, thesis defences, and conference presentations. The largest single event type is courses in international degree programmes run in English. Most events involve dialogue or polylogue: interactive, multi-participant events constitute the bulk of the data (for more on the compilation principles, see Mauranen 2003b, 2006b).

As a reference corpus of comparable native speaker data I have used the 1.7 million-word Michigan Corpus of Spoken Academic English (MICASE: [www.hti.umich.edu/m/micase/](http://www.hti.umich.edu/m/micase/)). Just as ELFA is not entirely confined to non-native speakers, MICASE does not exclude other than native speakers entirely, even though the proportion of non-natives is small.

## **5. Discourse reflexive speech among academic ELF speakers**

As already discussed, it is generally agreed that the basic function of reflexive discourse is to organise, describe, and comment on the ongoing discourse. Instances of discourse reflexivity from the ELFA corpus are in Example (1).

(1) so erm *I'm not going talk about security policy i will talk about finland...*  
and I think also *what i would like to ask you in this context...*  
and then *we're gonna discuss a little bit about why it is so surprising...*  
*to put it blunt if you put it a bit bluntly so that's what i find problematic...*  
*so we can call that the integration dilemma because gaining prosperity...*  
*I am going to bring the example of er of Ukraine...*  
*but are you going to talk about other excluded groups as well*

### **5.1 Question-related items**

To begin this exploration into ELF discourse reflexivity, let us focus on a common and fundamental function of academic discourse, namely asking and answering questions. Clearly, a lot of the time speakers feel that their questions in particular need a framing which prepare the ground for actually presenting the question and which makes it clear that what follows is to be interpreted as a question, demanding a response. I set out to do searches on three items related to this function, namely *ask*, *answer*, and *question*.

The most frequent of the items is *question* (7.2/100,000w), also common in MICASE (Mauranen 2002). In MICASE, it was frequently used in an evaluative function, prominently in the combination *good question*. The same evaluative use was attested in ELFA, as shown by the concordances in Example (2):

(2)

[er well] yeah yeah why yeah that's a *good question* I don't know what h they aren't effective enough that's a *good question* 'cause well , comes thing instead of quality mhm that's that's a *good question* mhm just usability [is] something to do with that it's a *good question* but I er @@ okay let's go (xx) conditions yes that's a very *good question* er I try to ask good ques you start with starch yeah that's a *good question* I I also have done er con any empirical that's a very good very *good question* I don't know of any empir but it's a good question it's a *good question*. thanks very much thank what counts as not successful but it's a *good question* it's a good question

In ELFA, phrases including *question* are typically used in a framing or prefacing capacity. The most recurrent forms are *one question*, *my question is*, and *I have/ I've got a question*. These concordance lines (Example 3) below illustrate the use of *one question*:

(3)

and *one question* when you say that er , that when European allies prefer okay well I have *one question* it's not exactly yeah on this essay I had just *one question* [because] [yeah] I was reading so okay er , so one *one question* about those er choosing I'd like to raise *one question* and, and er they are so exc erm yeah *one question* what about educating boys [I've

*Ask* is also fairly common (3.6/100,000w) in the data. The most dominant pattern is *I would like to ask (you)*, followed by *I want(ed) to ask (you)*. Thus, both of the most common patterns include an element which is hedging, or distancing: *would like*, *want*, *wanted*. A similar tendency to hedge discourse reflexive items was noticed among native speakers (Mauranen 2001). We can relate this to the interpretation suggested above that discourse reflexivity imposes the speaker's order on the discourse, and is therefore in some need of redressing the power balance between participants (whether they are speaker and hearer or writer and reader). The speaker can be seen as softening the imposition by the hedge. What we have here, then, is a kind of 'discourse collocation' (or perhaps 'pragmatic collocation'): two discourse pragmatic features whose significance arises from their roles in social interaction, and which tend to co-occur for interactional rather than lexicogrammatical reasons. This shows also in the tendency of *I would like to*, a clearly softening expression, to combine with discourse reflexive expressions (Example 4):

(4)

so *I would like to ask* about what do you mean about e-governisation can you *I would like to ask* erm about the concept information society er erm are we are the last question *I would like to ask* it was the second page and the the last to come back to your paper *I would like to ask* why performativity is not used in

are , @@ er writing *I would like to address two questions* I I mean , you m i do like the essay *I would like to bring up*, an issue that like could be in- i n the bibliography so *I would like to draw your attention* that er at the master wo countries and here *I would like to especially erm discuss* the problem of ho would like to start *I would like to make* a very very short *comment* mhm h] mhm er so at first *I would like to say* that er for instance in lithuania as i ely put mhm-hm then *I would like to show* you something more of er from f member in the group *I would like you to s-* you to yeah tell tell m- *tell us* a l

About half of all the instances of the frame *I would like to* occur together with discourse reflexive expressions. This is a very large proportion of the collocative potential of any expression, and means that collocation with discourse reflexivity is one of its major functions. The rest of the collocational environments of *I would like to* are not far from discourse reflexivity either; for example there are many cognitive verbs which on many occasions appear in indirect questions (...*so i would like to know maybe if the information society...*).

The last search word in this group, *answer*, turned out to occur too rarely for discerning patterning; the only repeated sequence was *did I answer your question*, but even this was infrequent.

These findings seem to suggest that since this connection between discourse reflexivity and polite tentativeness occurs in both ELF and native speaker English, it is a response to the demands of social interaction rather than a particular set of items, which collocate in native speakers' repertoires. Such a collocation also goes well beyond the normal teaching curriculum, so that the expressions are likely to have been spontaneously acquired in interaction by both native and ELF speakers.

## **5.2 Discourse reflexive verbs with generic senses**

There are a number of verbs which are often used in expressions of discourse reflexivity, and I wanted to take a small selection of them into sharper focus here. The best initial view into a domain is provided by frequently occurring items when large corpus data is not available yet. One criterion for selecting items for exploration here was therefore their frequency.

We can distinguish between two types of verb in terms of how specific they are in their meaning. This is often an important consideration in contexts where phraseology is concerned, because phraseological units get their meaning from the whole rather than just single items, and many discourse reflexive expressions seem to have a strong tendency to appear as partly fixed, partly varying phraseological units. In brief, they seem to follow Sinclair's (1991) 'idiom principle'. In accounting for the meanings of phraseological units, it is important to take into account the amount of independent meaning that individual elements contribute to the unit as a whole. I therefore selected a couple of verbs with a fairly generic sense, and two others with a fairly specific sense, to get an idea of how they might behave in discourse reflexive expressions.



Starting from generic sense verbs, DISCUSS and BRING (UP)<sup>1</sup> are taken up here on account of their frequent occurrences in the corpus.

To begin with DISCUSS, the main sense which emerges from this data is ‘to deal with a topic’ or ‘to indicate that a particular topic is dealt with’. It functions as an organising verb, enabling the participants to keep track of the topics covered so far in the discourse and those to be covered later, referring back and forward in the discourse. Speakers in the ELFA and MICASE corpora share these main functions – but these are somewhat differently distributed. In ELFA, the preferred function is ‘immediate discourse organising of own or interlocutor’s speech, which can be seen in the concordance extract (5) below:

(5) ‘immediate discourse organising’ (ELFA)

are talking about northern europe and only *we are discussing about* turkey er  
the final thing what's is still missing and *we've been discussing here* is the n-  
things like dystopia we we see as and *we haven't discussed about* utopia  
ernmental organisations but now *we are mainly discussing* intergovernmental  
er er the baltic states and here *I would like to discuss* these er points it would  
n them that's all that I've done there and I *I was discussing* whether or not I  
five significant er figures o- of course *we discussed about* these GPC values

The other major function, which in MICASE was the most typical use is ‘long-range discourse organising’. This served to relate the discussion in focus to a bigger picture, a larger context of the speech event or a series of interrelated speech events, which so often comprise academic discourse wholes like lecture courses or conferences. It also seems to be a convenient tactical device for postponing discussion on a topic. These uses are seen in (6).

(6) ‘long-range organising’ (MICASE)

that is where you share and *discuss* the results of the lab, and, really, focus on  
what\_ we're gonna meet after class and *discuss* it but, what I've seen is that\_  
ver for first reads and *discuss* on second reads we're actually gonna *discuss* at  
and we can, um go ahead and, *discuss* at the passage next week then does a  
nucleophile ever and we can *discuss* why sometime if you really want to it's a  
question, and maybe one we could *discuss* within the framework of this class  
slides, yeah okay, so did you guys *discuss* gluconeogenesis yet? no  
therapies that I won't have time to *discuss* today but in fact they are in clinical  
while I don't have time to *discuss* it today, um experiments with collaborators

Despite this difference in the distribution of the preferred functions, the full range of functions was used in both ELF and native speaker databases, with some slight variation in form.

The other frequent discourse reflexive verb with a generic sense was BRING (UP). The basic sense was the same for both ELF and native speakers, ‘to introduce a topic to

<sup>1</sup> I shall be using small caps to denote a lemma, as distinct from individual word forms, which are in italics

the discussion'. The two corpora showed no difference in relative quantitative terms after the non-reflexive uses of the verb had been filtered out. The form, however, showed traces of unorthodoxy in ELFA. We could characterise the variation as 'approximative', in that there was minor and seemingly random variation: instead of BRING *up* the speakers often used plain BRING in the same sense.

Two major functions in the data were apparent. Firstly, 'introducing a topic', illustrated in (7):

(7) 'introducing a topic' (ELFA)

deal with different groups and to allow them , space to live some er , *now I er* , *bring my example* from... a , I think a very multicultural er town...

The second major function for BRING (UP) could be labelled 'justifying speaker's own contribution' as in (8):

(8) 'justifying speaker's own contribution' (ELFA)

yeah particularly important Estonia so er , I mean I *I'm bringing this because* this is a kind of brings the the the the matters of the...

These two uses were shared by both speaker groups - but in addition to these, there was a third which only appeared in MICASE, that is, in the native speaker corpus. This could be termed 'evaluating other's contribution'. The concordances in (9) show this use:

(9) 'evaluating other's contribution' (MICASE)

ms. point, *I'm glad you brought that up*. higher price the point is, th  
yeah it was unfortunately *I'm glad you brought it up* but it complicates it  
actually I'm no I'm gla- *I'm glad you brought that up*. yes do women  
there in the start. um... uh, *I'm very glad you brought that up* because  
so that, um, you know well I'm *I'm glad you brought that up* because I,  
so let's\_ actually *you guys have brought up a lot of, important points in*  
question. *this is a really good, a really good point that you bring up*. um, I  
I think that *that was a very important point that you, brought up* a moment

The evaluative use had apparently not been taken on board by the ELF speakers. It seems, then, that the ELF speakers have adopted two major uses of the reflexive function, but not a third. What we can thus see here an instance of a missing function of an item whose other functions have been adopted. This could be seen as 'functional simplification', and it seems quite reasonable to assume that this might be a more widespread phenomenon in ELF and other language contact situations. More research into this is certainly called for.

### 5.3 Discourse reflexive verbs with specific senses

Moving on to verbs with specific senses, I start with COMMENT. In comparison to the native speaker data, ELF speakers used it proportionally more often: the absolute

figure was 40 discourse reflexive occurrences in ELFA as opposed to 60 in MICASE. If one bears in mind the fact that the MICASE corpus was several times larger than ELFA at this point, the difference is noteworthy. It is also interesting to note that this is not in accordance with the observation in learner language (e.g. Altenberg and Granger 2001) that it is general-sense verbs which get overrepresented in learner language.

The basic meaning of COMMENT is roughly to 'give an opinion or explanation'. It is often accompanied by high-frequency auxiliaries, which often lend it a mitigating air. The typical patterning in the MICASE is the following:

*/I want/wanted to/ + (make a) comment*  
*/let me (just)/*  
*/can I/*

COMMENT functions as a preface to a turn or speech act, either introducing one (...*but before that I still say some brief comments the first...* (ELFA), or inviting a particular kind of speech act, as in (10a and b):

(10) inviting a speech act (ELFA)

- (a) thank you . erm questions *comments*, (corrections) well we know that...  
 (b) ...er your work *I don't know if you can erm just comment on it very briefly* but I'm interested to know...

Since commenting is an evaluative act, it is not at all surprising that considerations of face considerations are strongly present in the context, thus the common collocation with mitigators – *thank you Dean Newmann uh I just wanna make a few comments uh, two things* (MICASE) is present in both user groups. This is further support to the tendency of hedges and discourse reflexive items to collocate.

Although hedges collocated with COMMENT in both corpora, ELF speakers hedged it less than native speakers. In MICASE, the most typical pattern for COMMENT was to co-occur with the mitigating type of hedges. Despite the less stable tendency to do this among ELF speakers, mitigators appeared in ELFA as well (11 a, b).

(11) hedging with COMMENT (ELFA)

- (a) well *can I co- comment [that er] [yes] o-* on the other hand  
 (b) in any case I *just a first comment* and this this was very

The main senses and functions of the verb are thus shared by native and ELF speakers. Two differences are nevertheless manifest in the usage. One is a matter of lexical choice: when COMMENT is a noun, ELF speakers occasionally use different verbs from those occurring in MICASE (...*say some brief comments*). The verbs tend to fall within the semantic field of speaking, and are thus easily comprehensible in the context of commentary. They just happen to be lexical choices which slightly differ from those preferred by native speakers, and which therefore could serve as subtle indicators of non-nativeness without impeding communicative efficiency.

The other difference is that ELF speakers employ different prepositions with the verb (...*I just like to make a brief comment of this* (ELFA). This is essentially a formal difference, and prepositional choices seem generally to show variation in ELF speech. This is the kind of variation in choices of lexical or grammatical item that can be termed ‘approximation’- ELF speakers approximating the target language expressions, but not doing it exactly in line with natives.

In all, ELF use of COMMENT was very similar to that of native speakers. The manifest similarity in the use of COMMENT in the corpora may originate in the existence of a cognate verb in many speakers’ first languages, in much the same meaning. This would make it a salient and familiar verb to many of the speakers.

The second verb with a specific sense that emerged as common in discourse reflexive use is REFER. It had very similar relative frequencies in both databases, and the main meanings were the same. To start with MICASE, each of the principal meanings was clearly associated with its own pattern. These accounted for practically every instance of the verb:

- (a) pronoun + *refer to...as*, meaning ‘call’
- (b) pronoun + BE *referring to* sth, meaning ‘topic’

These meaning-form associations can be seen in concordance extracts (12) and (13) below:

(12) discourse reflexive *refer as* ‘call’ (MICASE)

d and *this is, what I refer to as the instrumentalization of the Holocaust.*  
d News Methodists *who I refer to as Bad News Methodists* and, um, you  
wo have been *what, what I refer to as the auto-route models.* and the the the  
cap T *which I refer to as the scaling factor...* is the maximum of T-sub-V,  
population *which we refer to as melanoma, B-sixteen* they're still the cell  
terms. *we often refer to expression of a regulated gene as basal expression*  
etimes *I refer to that as, vertically-dominated region of the rack* and what I  
body. *we loosely refer to this as the top of the loop,* sort of right above the  
hat have cancer. and *we refer, to this as tumor progression.* and this simply

(13) discourse reflexive *referring* ‘topic’ (MICASE)

today very much so. uh and uh and *I'm referring of course to Basque,* which  
rocess. but uh (th-) *what you're referring to is pronunciation of this word*  
ets that we got I'm no no uh *I'm referring to this* I'm not sure if I remember  
but since *you're referring back to the original of this,* then that brings up  
i mean part of, *what we're referring to* is that you started so quickly, jumping  
th century. and *to which religious order am I referring* and to which famous  
ve taken away from it? *what we were referring to,* uh based on Gary's  
ns we need. and *which cycle times am I referring to?* well single-command

As already observed, the same meanings were present in ELFA (14 and 15):

## (14) 'call' (ELFA)

resentation *what we refer to as the postmodern representation of the child* ended regulation but which *which I'm referring to negative regulation* but on take out that mess that mess *I'm referring northern dimension* (.) ideological and I have basic reasons *to refer* and *I'm referring* because the tensions was

## (15) 'topic' (ELFA)

ce or *you don't refer* at all *to the Northern Europe* what is what kind of a role though *you didn't refer that much to theories* but eh the way said you pr ould i first say that *you also refer to political culture* (.) in one of your then there is a political interest but *you don't refer to* in your neither your report *you* rather straightforward *refer to enzymatic degradation* one something really can't explain then *you refer to political culture* eh that ou mean *why did I refer to that?* I was more like when I was defining why a loss of amorphous phase er . *you you refer to. post-crystallisation* ng from the east all the time which *I'm referring* eh Soviet Union (.) or something S2: even when *I was referring* eh the Nordic Countries situation you have and *not really referring to* the past all the time in terms of the way which I *I was just referring to* the way which mention media and business eh *are you actually referring to* Nokia or couple S1: eh *I was more of eh referring to* (.) a single mother ehm arti ble development erm *I'm referring* I'm talking about er global welfare not

As the above concordance lines show, we find ELF speakers using both forms in both senses, without making a similar form-function distinction as native speakers. The meanings seem to have been adopted and employed appropriately even in respect of native norms and certainly from the perspective of communicative effectiveness, but something of the form has been apparently ignored.

In discourse reflexive use, the 'call' sense, REFER AS, is a name-giving act (*what I refer to as the auto-route models*) or term explanation (*which we refer to as melanoma B-sixteen*), apparently much used in lecturing, where 'we' comprises the profession, the community into which the students are on their way to enter. The other, 'topic' sense was clearly more common among ELF speakers, and its instances were equally divided between the plain infinitive and the ing form. This blurring of the form-function distinction is perhaps not entirely surprising, since the distinction seems somewhat peripheral, even arbitrary, in not following any very general principle of English grammar: REFER is certainly a verb which takes the ing form. Although its use in the 'topic' sense follows a general principle of pointing to instantial use in currently ongoing discourse, there is nothing inherently ungrammatical in using the ing form and *as* together under appropriate circumstances. Such use simply does not seem to surface in a corpus, perhaps on account of its smallish size. The distinction between the two uses is not likely be very salient in language input, especially in comparison to the specific meaning of the lemma REFER itself. The blurring of the formal detail is also visible in the instances where *as* is dropped with the 'call' sense.

Again, this looks like what was called approximation above. This would seem to point to some uncertainty in form in ELF speech, and priority given to meaning. What also seems to have happened is that the meaning of *refer* has become slightly extended or diluted in ELF – which is also something we might reasonably expect in language change or dialect contact.

## 6. Conclusion

Discourse reflexivity is a central feature of academic discourse, and present in English language discourse independently of the speaker's native language. It is thus not dispensed with in communication where effectiveness but not native-likeness is an important concern. This small exploration into a few common expressions of discourse reflexivity in English supports the notion that discourse reflexivity, the capacity of language to talk about itself, is among the necessary features of language (Hunston and Francis 1999), or perhaps more appropriately phrased in this context, a discourse universal.

A vast amount of earlier research has shown that discourse reflexivity is culturally variable but characteristic of academic text in many languages, and it has also been attested in spoken discourse. Evidence from English as a lingua franca adds a particular flavour to earlier research findings, because it is not culture-dependent. Especially in its spoken form, there are no culture-specific preferences that would guide the practices of international academic use despite the fact that the common language is English. The situation is more like in the case of mediaeval Latin, where the language had a vehicular status, and developed regional features, but was essentially used in written and specialised usage, following the traditions of the academic discourse communities rather than classical (or other) Latin culture.

What makes spoken ELF particularly interesting for discourse reflexivity research is, as noted at the outset, the unpredictability of the discourse situations where a number of background languages and cultures come into contact and which needs to be managed by the interlocutors. We would therefore expect to see discourse strategies of clarity and explicitness, which, as pointed out before (Mauranen 1993a, 1993b), are among the consequences of discourse reflexivity, and thereby also among the motives for using it. This is exactly what we saw in the present study.

In terms of expressions, we expected to find similar functions but partly different realisations of discourse reflexivity in ELF and L1 English. This was largely borne out in the expressions selected for focus in the present study. They showed much similarity in function, form, and distribution across native speaker status, but certain differences surfaced as well. Thus, compared to L1 use, ELF expressions showed the following features:

- forms were often approximate rather than accurate;
- some form-function pairings were ignored;
- some specific functions of expressions were ignored.

In all, it would appear that ELF communication is primarily oriented to meaning rather than form, which is a recurrent finding in ELF research (summarised in for example Karhukorpi 2006). Similar observations have been made in institutional discourses between native and non-native speakers (Kurhila 2003). It would seem,

then, that subtle form-meaning correspondences and preferences are likely to be ignored if they do not cause communicative turbulence. It might be assumed that distinctions of form become salient when they are perceived to separate meanings in important ways. Evidence in support of such an assumption comes from the non-native-like lexical choices with COMMENT discussed above: the verbs were within the relevant semantic field, and presumably easily comprehensible, since there were no indications in the context that the other participants were experiencing difficulties. The choices just appeared to flout the kind of subtle idiomaticity that has been observed to distinguish native speakers from non-native speakers even at high levels of proficiency (e.g. Nattinger and de Carrico 1992, Schmitt and Carter 2004). Further support comes the two senses of REFER above, where the form-function pairing was apparently ignored, but the two senses were nevertheless employed effectively by ELF speakers.

What was termed approximation above seems to pertain to form in particular. Approximation was seen with prepositional choices, which were either dropped or used in a meaningful but not native-like manner. Again, there were no signs of incomprehension or communicative turbulence among the participants. In all, these features would seem to point to some uncertainty in form, and priority given to meaning in ELF discourse.

Although surface form seemed to be most affected in ELF discourse, meaning and functions did not remain intact either. Meaning seemed to get slightly blurred in the case of REFER, even though the two basic senses were clearly used. One use was quite dominant, and it is possible that the indiscriminate use of the forms reflected a lack of perceived sense distinction. This would not be unexpected in the case of language contact. On the other hand, the generally strong preference for the *ing* form attested in ELF (Ranta 2006) might suffice to explain the present data as well. Much more work is needed here. The missing evaluative function of BRING UP opens new questions, because functional simplification has not been posited for language contact in the literature, although it is in principle just as plausible as morphological, syntactic, semantic or lexical simplification.

An intriguing functional phenomenon is also the tendency of discourse reflexivity to collocate with hedging, in a way that I called above 'discourse collocation'. The collocational tendency was evident in both databases, which would seem to indicate that fundamental discourse functions are reproduced in ELF. The motivation for this would seem to arise from the nature of social interaction, where impositions on others need to be mitigated. However, the tension between clarity and non-imposition (or, positive and negative politeness) might be resolved in somewhat differently in ELF discourse as compared to any more local discourse, where participants can assume a good deal more to be shared at the outset. The finding that there was less hedging in connection with COMMENT in ELF speech could be seen as a preference of clarity over interpretative freedom. It is possible that politeness gets redefined in a global situation. It is conceivable that there is more demand for the features traditionally associated with positive politeness, in response to a need to construct a basis of solidarity, friendliness and above all clarity.

Another intriguing feature here is that, as was pointed out above, commenting is an evaluative act, and therefore calls for mitigation. As it was the evaluative use of

BRING UP which was comparatively ignored by ELF speakers, the question arises whether there might be something special about evaluative language use in lingua franca situations. This was of course a small sample of specific data, not selected to reflect evaluative use, so that the connection may be coincidental – but worth investigating further.

Clearly, clarity and explicitness are salient in academic discourse, and particularly crucial in a complex cross-cultural encounter like ELF discourse. Since discourse reflexivity contributes importantly to both, it is not surprising that it maintains a strong presence in English as a lingua franca.

### **Corpora consulted**

ELFA English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings.

[www.uta.fi/laitokset/kielet/engf/research/elfa/](http://www.uta.fi/laitokset/kielet/engf/research/elfa/)

MICASE The Michigan Corpus of Spoken Academic English.

[www.hti.umich.edu/m/micase/](http://www.hti.umich.edu/m/micase/)

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