Lexicogrammatical features in the Estonian spoken mini-corpus of English as a lingua franca

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Over the past decade, research into English as a lingua franca (ELF) has steadily developed into a thriving field. ELF has been studied from the perspective of pronunciation, but also lexis, grammar and pragmatics (Dewey, 2007; Jenkins, 2007; Ur, 2010; Walker, 2010; Kaur, 2011; Seidlhofer, 2011; Önen, 2014). Our research proceeds from two basic assumptions: first, that English does not *belong* to native speakers, since there are now more non-native than native speakers of English (Graddol, 2006; Seidlhofer, 2011) and second, that ELF is not a *language* as such, but rather "a means of communication not tied to particular countries and ethnicities, a linguistic resource that is not contained in, or constrained by, traditional (and notoriously tendentious) ideas of what constitutes 'a language'" (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 81). The latter idea is further echoed in Kohn (2015a; 2015b) who argues for a reconciliation between ELF and English language teaching, which still dominantly tends to focus on the correct use of standard English rather than the communicative needs of students.

Although ELF has obtained world-wide recognition, no excessive research on its lexicogrammatical features has been carried out in Estonia, with the exception of Soler-Carbonell (2014; 2015), who has explored the sociolinguistic aspects of ELF and university students' attitudes towards ELF in academic settings. Our study is therefore innovative as it broadens the scope of research on ELF by looking at a language that is typologically different from the (predominantly Indo-European) languages usually discussed in the studies carried out within this field. By comparing the data of Estonian ELF speakers to the data of other languages that have served as input for describing the characteristics of ELF, our study makes a crucial contribution towards validating the generality of the proposed characteristics of ELF.

For this purpose, 9 semi-structured interviews were recorded with Estonian ELF speakers at B1-C2 levels (all university students). All participants reported to be native speakers of Estonian (8 women and 1 man; average age 22.4 years). The interviews were transcribed using the free software EXMARaLDA and the VOICE conventions for transcription (https://www.univie.ac.at/voice/). In addition to the qualitative analysis of the data, a mixed-effects logistic regression model is fitted to the data in order to filter out any biases likely to be due to individual differences. Our data reveals some of the features identified by Seidlhofer (2004, p. 220), Dewey (2007) and Önen (2014), such as omitting and inserting articles, inserting, omitting and substituting prepositions and using verbs with high semantic generality in innovative collocations.

As to the practical outcomes, the findings from our mini-corpus could serve as reference material to teachers of English in Estonia who wish to increase their own and their students' awareness of ELF, since this is the foundation that should be laid before any specific features could be taught (see also Sifakis, 2014). We also hope to develop the corpus into a larger one by conducting more interviews and possibly also including other native languages, including speakers of English as a native language in order to facilitate direct comparisons between different groups of English speakers.

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