

BOOK REVIEW / Kitap İncelemesi

**ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA: A CORPUS BASED
ANALYSIS**

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This book is a comprehensive contribution of the field of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). It is mainly composed of two parts. Part 1 (Chapter 1-6), titled as Background, covers the emergence of corpora, research in ELF, idioms in lingua franca, L1 fluency model, L2 conversations in ELF context, and a dialogic framework for the discourse analysis of L2 conversations.

In Chapter 1, *Corpora*, Prodromou highlights the vitality of corpus for it provides an understanding of what corpora have uncovered and how implications can lead to the development of ELF. According to him, corpora are needed since they provide authentic natural data for the use of language. The concept of authenticity is argued and how authentic written or oral data could be understood by non-native speakers is questioned in the field of ELF. Prodromou also focuses on the importance of the pragmatic features of utterances, and of the context in which the corpus is collected. He acknowledges that authentic language could create difficulties for language learners as it sounds vague due to the factors such as culture embedded and metaphorical phrases, idiomatic utterances, and varieties of style. However, he doesn't take a strong stance here. He justifies that corpora present authentic language. Additionally, he acknowledges sides of the coin by stating that the language learners can transfer "here and now" utterances into "there and then" in the classroom setting, which may strip off the reality or offer too much reality. Idioms are regarded as a key issue in the discussion of real English versus ELF and it is linked with collocations. The use of corpora explores the importance of the collocations within native varieties, underlying the phraseological features of English along with the grammatical choices for the co-occurrence of the words. Prodromou also touches on the discussion of cultural representations in corpora, and reacts to the claim by Seidlhofer (2001) creating a cultural model from the created corpora. What he claims is

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that the nature of the cultural model based upon the corpora is flexible, allowing L2 users to place their sense of identity into multiple identities reflected throughout the corpora.

In Chapter 2, *Uncovering ELF*, the author empirically exemplifies the use of a word corpus based on six articles by Jenkins and Seidlhofer, and presents the corpus of ELF writers. The frequencies of lexical items in EFL writers' corpus, EFL colligations, collocation chunks, and key phrases are listed. Based on the collocation data such as prepositions and articles, which are considered as meaningful rather than empty units, Prodromou establishes the idea of EFL as an emerging model through which a non-native speaker communicates with another non-native speaker, and also as an emergent entity implying that language is a process by which different forms of input are produced. He continues to reframe EFL with expertise, acknowledging the differences in the definitions of expert profile in EFL. He cites Seidlhofer's reference for regarding the experts as being "highly competent and fluent users of ELF", while also criticizing this reference as quite opaque as there is a lack of examples in practice (p. 26). The use of idioms is mentioned in the context of ELF expertise. He recounts Seidlhofer's term as unilateral idioms for situations where an idiomatic use is not understood by one of the interlocutors, and implies that this can bring about a breakdown of communication in EFL settings. He suggests addressing the role of idioms in EFL as there is a need to provide more corpus-derived examples for EFL expertise.

In Chapter 3, *The idiomatic puzzle*, Prodromou continues the idiom issue listing his personal accounts of confusion, and states the reasons why even expert L2 users find idioms to be problematic. The category of idiom types fall into four groups: formulae such as pragmatic phrases (you know, sort of), collocations, (river + rise, make + application), phrases verbs (make up for, lose track of), and cultural idioms (see you later, alligator, as cool as cucumber). The representations of idiomatic categorization start with the minimal units, then move to two-word markers such as you know and I mean, as they are frequently used and have become standardized forms. Finally they end with the long word units such as proverbs or other colorful catchphrases, which are less frequent than minimal units and strongly related with the socio-cultural context of speech communities. The author focuses our attention on creative idioms which is regarded as the ultimate expression of near-native speaker fluency (p. 52). Then he states that as the idiomatic competence is complex and paradoxical, L2 users, even the successful ones, could have a difficulty in understanding some idiomatic expressions due to the cognitive, discoursal, pragmatic, phonological, and socio-cultural factors. These factors could explain the reasons; why, there are few analyses of non-native use of idiomatic expressions to address the acquisition of idioms and spontaneous performance of formulaic language use.

In Chapter 4, *Idiomaticity and fluency*, the author highlights the nature of fluency distinguishing it from formal accuracy and regarding it as spontaneity of phraseological utterances such as connectives, collocations, lexical phrases and recurring word patterns. He implies that fluency is not an indicator of grammatical accuracy; yet, it is an indicator of how fast or efficient the interlocutor brings the words together. Based on the study by Pawley and Syder, he discusses the idea of native-like word choice and native-like fluency to address the phraseological competence, and also their implications over the fluency of L2 users. Prodromou points out a socio-cultural account of fluency, which places idioms in the network of social relations and meaning, thus, he argues that fluency is context-bounded and jointly-constructed.

Chapter 5, *L2 conversation*, reviews the issue of native and non-native speaker (NS and NNS) dichotomy in SLA speech research and touches the idea that NNSs have deficits in spoken interactions due to incompetence in “shared knowledge, belief system and cultural system” (p. 72). Prodromou puts forward that in ESL research settings, the focus is on learners rather than adult users of English and the direction of interaction has a rigid nature where interaction between NS and NNS is more frequently observed rather than interaction between NNS and another NNS. Hence, the expected outcome of this unbalanced interaction is identification of the deficits in NNSs, namely, in their cross-cultural pragmatic competence. The author mentions the studies that highlight NNSs’ divergence from the appropriate use of language. He identifies native-centric tendencies within these studies and lists that the studies take formal settings rather than non-educative ones, and focus on isolated speeches or chunk of information rather than naturally occurring language. They also take the term, achievement in pragmatics, with NS norms rather than with L2 users’ performance in communication. Plus, they focus on ESL rather than EFL putting aside the socio-pragmatic complexities of communication. He acknowledges the studies in EFL where idioms are less salient than in L1 and but when use of idioms is the issue, it serves various functions.

Chapter 6, *From Conversation to Dialogue*, recounts the Vygotskian notion of lexis and grammar as being emergent through interactions and sketches the dialogic approach by Goofman and Baktin in parallel with the work by Sinclair. In Goofman’s work, as the author underlines that joint construction of meanings is the point. Baktin’s work focuses on the social construction of meaning by a group of participants during social interaction. The author states that idioms present complexity for L2 users in EFL settings due to the absence of shared knowledge, and cultural experiences.

Part 2 (Chapter 7-14), *Foreground*, presents the author’s corpus research on dialogic data and corpus methodology to see the frequency of

those patterns in face-to-face interaction and to revisit the divergence from L1 norms as a natural representation of creativity in language use. He gives some examples based on the occurrence of pragmatic markers “sort of”, minimal idiomatic units like “you see” and highlights their implications in ELF.

In Chapter 7, *Corpus data and methodology*, Prodromou displays his corpus that is composed of 160,000 words of L2 (excluding 40.000 words of L1 and keeping it as a separate corpus) and he gives information about the corpus profile. He presents his criteria for the placement of language data in his corpus referring to the definition of a successful user suggested by Alptekin (2002), and by the descriptors of the native centric standard exams such as TOEFL and IELTS. In the corpus, he regards L2 users as being successful users of English (SUE) since they fulfill the requirement of core grammatical accuracy and reflect linguistic and cultural diversity as language users. Furthermore, he justifies the selection of SUE based on his personal experiences with L2 users as an ELT teacher and trainer, and the bio-data he uses to create corpus of SUE. As for the corpus methodology, he did a careful investigation of SUE’s difficulty in using idiomatic patterns, fluency of L1 and L2, and the role of idioms in EFL. He creates a circular model for his analysis starting from linguistic forms, moving towards discourse and pragmatics, and covering the cultural experiences and knowledge.

In Chapter 8, *Two-word lexical phrases: Frequency*, the author presents the frequency of L1 and L2 users’ two-word phrases (TWP) such as “you know”, “I mean”, “I think”, “sort of”, “and then”, “a bit” and so forth. He presents his observations about semantic and pragmatic functions of the most frequently used pattern in L1 and L2. He concludes that some TWPs occur with similar frequency both in L1 and L2 corpora (e.g., kind of), while some others do not (e.g., sort of). This implies that the variation in occurrence might be bound to some pragmatic conditions of the patterns.

In Chapter 9, *Short of and company*, presents a detailed analysis of the variation in the occurrence of “sort of” in both corpora. “Sort of” as a pragmatic marker and pattern together with its collocation position is analyzed and the pragmatic intentions attached to it are found to be related with interpersonal convergence or imprecision of thought. In L1, “it helps speakers to maintain and regulate relationships in terms of degrees of idiomaticity, formality and politeness strategies” (p. 146).

In Chapter 10, *A sort of puzzle for the L2 user*, the author tries to explain the differences between L1 and L2 corpora in terms of the collocate and semantic prosody of “sort of”. He draws our attention on L1 use of sort of for expressing informality, implying the speaker’s linguistic sloppiness. This is the point where L2 users come close to L1. However, he acknowledges that in L1 discourse, sort of can be used to build a relationship among the

interlocutors, yet, in L2, it can display “uncomfortable moments of diversion from a norm” (p. 174).

In Chapter 11, *You see and friends: Small words, big meanings*, he also gives a case of you see to present another difference between L1 and L2 corpora to employ you see. “You see” does not only fulfill the function of explanation, but also of responsiveness and back channeling. What the author claims is that as it has non-propositional meaning for L2 users, the difficulty in using it is linked with the extended pragmatic network.

In Chapter 12, *You see, it's different for the L2 user*, a detailed account of discourse strategies that L2 users employ is given. The author comments that L2 users could employ non-authentic use of you see; however, he finds it clear that L1 and L2 users have a tendency to use it as an isolated lexical item as well as a set that creates discourse network among interlocutors. He gives a well-stated justification that L2 users should not be identified as lacking commonalities (common cultural experiences or knowledge) since the relational meaning of idioms is integral to create and maintain communication. Additionally, discourse content can decrease and increase distance between the speakers no matter which linguistic backgrounds they have.

Chapter 13, *Idiomacity: Unilateral, creative*, Prodromou lists examples of cases where unilateral idiomatics occur. He also presents data of creative idiomatics, which is referred to as the ultimate frontier of L1 in Chapter 3, with no grammatical errors. Some samples include raise an eyebrow (lift an eyebrow), back-up copies (security copies), and a standard question (a staple question) leaking oil (missing oil). He claims that these might be counted as instances for creativity of language use; however, L2 users might avoid using creative idioms not because of their linguistic capacity or competence but to avoid deviations from NS norms.

In Chapter 14, *Implications for EFL*, the author reviews the issue of ELF position going back to the discussion in Chapter 2, and once again, he argues that EFL is not a language variety but an issue of how L2 users prefer to use it for the construction of and reconstruction of self as a communicator and self as an identity owner. He concludes the chapter with a very good ironic analogy observing that “EFL scholars occasionally slide imperceptibly from a legitimate description of variety in language use to a position that puts the prescriptive cart after descriptive horse, it makes a model of the muddle of variant form to be found in ELF. Prodromou’s book is a useful resource with detailed corpus data display to support the idea that EFL is not a separate variety; yet, an emergent outcome of heterogeneity detached from the certain native norms of L1 users and it should be taken “with its own term”. The book contributes to the discussion of NS and NNS dichotomy, as the author takes a clear stance in the discussion. He opens the chapters with a quotation from

various genres that give a taste of the reading before moving to his points. The quotations are from BBC radio program show in Chapter 4, from *Middlemarch* by G. Elliot in Chapter 9, from a Greek teacher, *Hamlet* in Chapter 11, *Henry V* in Chapter 12, from the *Merchant of Venice* in Chapter 13. He enriches the discussion of L1 and L2 users' variations in using certain pragmatic markers with a comprehensive literature review and his personal experiences. In the first part, he overviews the theoretical issues in EFL context. In the second part, he presents his own corpus study to support the discussion of L2 users' preferences in using certain pragmatic patterns, which avoids leading our attention to the L2 users' deficits. This book could also be a resource for researchers of corpus-based studies and EFL teachers who are confused or frustrated with the dichotomy of NS and NNS as it provides a basic understanding of the discussions about identity representation in foreign language teaching.

References

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