English as a lingua franca - What it is and what it isn't

Based on empirical research, English as a lingua franca (ELF) can be characterized as a communicative mode that is used among speakers of different lingua-cultural backgrounds as part of their often plurilingual language repertoires. It is a highly fluid and variable resource, which requires its speakers to constantly (re-)negotiate common, and probably more importantly, non-shared linguistic and cultural ground. Interestingly, the factors contributing to communicative success in such constellations and the way it is defined from the interactants' perspective only partially overlap with what is generally promoted as linguistic norms in English classrooms at all levels. We therefore need to rethink the way English is taught and tested today.

In my presentation, I will discuss how such a rethinking seems to be taking place in current language education discourse. Or does it? - The subject of very often highly controversial debate in academic discourse, the notion of English as a lingua franca is now also increasingly evoked and referred to – by name or in spirit – in more applied contexts such as language policy documents, curricula, textbooks for teacher education and teaching material. Very often, however, this is done in a pre-theoretical and pre-emirical way, as a convenient catchphrase to underline the material's relevance in today's globalized world. ELF has thus successfully joined the ranks of other buzz words in language education discourse. The sloganization of "English as the world's lingua franca" in these texts (but also in some camps of academic discourse on ELF) happens along mainly three lines: ELF is either, rather naively, equated with British or American English, or it is trivialized or even demonized as an 'anti-slogan' (cf. 'broken English', 'threat to multilingualism' etc.). Alternatively, it is simply ignored, a 'non-slogan' as it were. In my paper I will analyze these different ways in which ELF has become sloganized and show how the most effective approach to challenging such views is – unsurprisingly – continued empirical research coupled with careful mediation of its findings into pedagogical contexts such as e.g. teacher education.

Literature


Hülmbauer, Cornelia (2013) The real, the virtual and the plurilingual - English as a lingua franca in a linguistically diversified Europe. PhD Dissertation, University of Vienna.


