LANGUAGE AND ACADEMIC IDENTITY: SOCIOLINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA IN THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

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Abstract

Language is closely connected to personal, social, and cultural identity. The article Language and Academic Identity: Sociolinguistic Aspects of English as a Lingua Franca in the Scientific Community describes the relationship between using English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) at universities and the image of the researcher in the scientific community. English has been widely recognised as the language of the international research community. Yet, while ELF has facilitated international co-operation and knowledge exchange, language choice has an effect on the researcher as an individual. Qualitative interviews with 40 lecturers and researchers at universities in Austria, Russia, Denmark, Ukraine, the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, India, the UK, Slovenia, Mexico, France, Finland, and Saudi Arabia, conducted in May 2015, give an insight into the sociolinguistic aspects of using ELF. The survey shows that ELF is a language of communication as well as a language of identification in the scientific community. Currently, English has more status and prestige in the scientific community than other languages and

attaches to the user the image of being a successful, international, bilingual or multilingual member of the scientific community.

Keywords

Sociolinguistics, Elf (English as a Lingua Franca), Identity, Scientific Community, Spoken and Written Discourse

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1. Introduction

Identity and language are closely connected, and, thus, also identity in the scientific community is created and shaped by language. By using or not using English alongside other languages, researchers and lecturers show to themselves and to the scientific community how they see and position themselves and others in that community.

English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) is a language of identification as well as a language of communication for the scientific community. What the use of ELF says about a person‟s identity and social status in the scientific community is the core issue of this study. This paper looks, first, at the connection of language and identity, then at the role of English in the scientific community, and finally discusses results of the qualitative survey done to give insight into sociolinguistic aspects of EFL in the scientific community.

2. Identity and Language

Identity is constructed in different ways, with language playing a role in that construction. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) argue for taking the socio-cultural approach to analyses identity in linguistic interaction and discuss a framework which is based on five principles, namely the emergence principle, the positionality principle, the indexicality principle, the relationality principle, and the partialness principle. The framework enables researchers to look at language as well as society and culture.

Generally speaking, identity is constructed via discourse and emerges in action (emergence principle), it is related to social subjectivity, local identity, and interactional positions (positionality principle), it is created by certain linguistic forms (indexicality principle), it is a relational phenomenon (relationally principle), and it may be in part a deliberate and intentional construction (partialness principle) (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

According to Ochs (1993), identity is constructed not only by the speakers themselves but also by others. In his/her language, a speaker uses certain social acts or stance to build his/her identity and, at the same time, assigns a certain identity to the other. Both, acts and stance, are performed verbally and are socially recognized. A social act is any goal-directed behavior, and social stance refers to a point of view or attitude. Making requests or contradicting other people is examples of social acts, and certainty, uncertainty, or emotions about a certain proposal, are seen as stance (Ochs, 1993).

The perspective of performance in the context of language and identity has also been put forward by Bauman (2000). Performance means that identity is created in the process of interaction and is motivated by communication. Speakers construct their identities by selecting from verbal resources which identify and affiliate them socially. Language in performance does not only have linguistic form but also implies cultural and social forms (Bauman, 2000).

Crystal (2010) categories language and identity in three ways: social identity, contextual identity, and stylistic identity. He poses an apparently simple question that sums up the role of language: "What are you, in the eyes of the society to which you belong." (Crystal, 2010). No straightforward answer can be given in terms of sociolinguistic and ethnolinguistic variables. Variables for social identity are, for example, gender, age, education, social status, and social role as well as the choice of language itself. Contextual identity deals with the factors of setting, participants, and activity, and linguistic features produced by these factors include channel, code, message form, and subject matter. Stylistic identity looks at personal style as an identification marker and examines factors, such as formal characteristics, size and diversity of vocabulary, and single words (Crystal, 2010).

In any interaction, identity is created with language by both the speaker and by others. In the context of this study, which looks at the scientific community, identity is considered as being shaped not only by the way lecturers and researchers themselves use English in various situations but also by the way they see, perceive, and judge the English used by others. Interactions, contexts, styles, the choice of native languages or English in specific contexts, issues connected to writing and speaking styles, and competence play a role in linguistic identity creation.

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3. ELF – English as a Lingua Franca in the Scientific Community

The English language itself has to be taken into account in a sociolinguistic discussion of university internationalization as Haberland and Mortensen (2012) point out. The role of English and language diversity in the international classroom with a focus on students is subject of several publications (for example: Cohen, et al., 2015; Lambert & Iliescu Gheorghiu, 2014; James, 2006; Smit, 2010; Söderlundh, 2012).

At universities worldwide, English has become a popular communication tool and is considered to be the language of science and the scientific community also outside English-speaking countries. The number of non-native speakers of English communicating with other non-native speakers of English is continuously increasing. The globalization of universities, international student mobility, and transnational education has an impact on the English language. ELF is used in written publications as well as in English medium lectures and presentations (Graddol, 2006).

Research on ELF concentrates on the question of which variety of English should be taken as a standard of performance, on the one hand, and on business communication (BELF), on the other (Ehrenreich, 2010). Regarding the standard of English to be taken as a model for learners, the question of English as a non-native language, for example „Euro-English", „International English", or „Global English", and English as a native language is discussed (Smit, 2010; Grzega, 2005; Seidlhofer, 2011). Smit (2010) offers a description of the models of English.

In ELF the native speakers of English no longer play a role, and their language is not used as the target model anymore. Mutual intelligibility and intercultural communication competences are considered as more important than native speaker competence. The model speaker of ELF is a fluent bilingual who, with his/her own national accent, has the skills to communicate successfully with another non-native speaker (Graddol, 2006). Speakers see EFL as a "repertoire of communicative instruments" (House, 2003, p. 559) at their disposal. Speakers employ norms in EFL that are generally fluid and, as long as a certain level of understanding is given, generally adopt a „let it pass" attitude.

There are, however, different attitudes towards norms in spoken and norms in written language. With regard to the „let it pass" attitude, Gnutzmann (2010) points to the fact that

tolerance and openness in terms of non-native speakers" use of English are shown only for spoken discourse. In written communication, however, the native speaker model is still taken as the norm and the benchmark to be reached. Highly ranked journals and publishers are usually based in the Anglo-American world and editors "watch out for correctness in language as gatekeepers"" (Gnutzmann, 2010, translated).

Using ELF in researching and publishing has met with several questions. Issues arising in the context of English in the scientific community include if English is a threat to multilingualism (House, 2003), if English is connected to cultural imperialism (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1993; Chew, 1993; Anderman, 1993; Gnutzmann, 2008), if the use of English means the acquisition of an Anglo-Saxon mindset, and if native speakers of English have advantages over non-native speakers (Gnutzmann, 2008).

According to House (2003), English is not a threat to national languages and multilingualism. She distinguishes between languages for communication and languages for identification and classifies ELF as a language for communication. Speakers are multilingual and use ELF as a means to interact with each other. Linguistically and culturally, speakers are more likely to identify themselves by means of their native language(s) and local languages. ELF is not used to mark identity but rather has instrumental purposes. Thus, ELF does not threaten national or local languages. Haber land and Mortensen (2012) agree and say that, while English is global, it does not "swamp […] all other languages, marginaliz[ing] them or mak[ing] them redundant" (Haberland & Mortensen, 2012).

Gnutzmann (2008) looks at English in academic communication and discusses anglophony, i.e. the use of English as the communicative norm in books and journals published outside English-speaking countries. Although a common, universally understood language in science and scientific communication is usually regarded as positive and desirable, English has a different standing for subjects strongly related to specific languages and cultures.

Opinions on the prevalence of English in academic communication depend largely on the subject areas and the individual ideological and sociocultural stances. Some argue that monolingualism has an influence on research content and the use of English in social sciences leads to a loss of diversity and to a certain one-sidedness (Mortensen & Haberland, 2012), while others see existing, living multilingualism as the basis of current scientific development

(Gnutzmann, 2008).

To answer the question of a possible acquisition of the Anglo-Saxon mindset, Gnutzmann (2008) differentiates between three types of sciences based on their level of anglophony: Firstly, there are anglophone sciences, which use exclusively English and for which the subject matter is supranational rather than culturally specific. Examples for anglophone sciences are mathematics, natural sciences, and theoretical medicine. Secondly, there are sciences affected by anglophony, which tend to use national languages but switch to English for international discourse. Applied natural sciences, earth science, economics, psychology, sociology, and linguistics are sciences affected by anglophony. Thirdly, there are polyglot sciences, which are tied to national languages and cultures as cognition is bound to language. Examples include law, theology, pedagogy, classical philosophy, and cultural studies. While polyglot sciences are usually closely tied to the languages and cultures they are based in, there is an increase of using English for publications also in these subjects.

Gnutzmann (2008) argues that, in the first two types of sciences, an Anglo-Saxon mindset is not necessarily acquired as these sciences tend to be more supranational. In polyglot sciences, however, the Anglo-Saxon mindset might be transferred if texts on national, regional, and cultural issues are read in English. These issues then tend to have an Anglo-Saxon perspective. The point of language, culture, and thinking is also taken up by Alexander (2008), who points to the philosophical and psychological issue of a connection between language and thought.

As far as native and non-native speakers of English are concerned, the native speaker of English is at a clear advantage when English is used, regardless of the type of science. As already mentioned above, the tolerance for non-native use of English does not apply to written communication. Mutual understanding does not seem to be enough, and non-native speakers could be at a disadvantage. They perhaps feel a lack of linguistic and communicative competence in terms of stylistic requirements, quality of language, and translation problems, and, unlike native speakers, they have to invest not only energy and time but perhaps also money in learning English (Gnutzmann, 2008).

4. Survey

To find out more about the sociolinguistic aspects of language and academic identity, a qualitative online survey with lecturers and researchers was conducted. In April and May 2015, the survey with 39 questions was made available through the online survey tool Survey monkey („Survey Monkey," 1999).

Sampling was done as a convenience sample. Colleagues at the Institute of International Management at the University of Applied Sciences Graz, Austria, at partner universities in India, Mexico, and Russia, partners in research projects, and researchers subscribed to the listserv list ib-language were invited to take part in the survey. Respondents were also asked to pass the link on to any colleagues interested in the survey. 67 surveys were started, and 40 surveys were completed. In this study, only the completed surveys are analyzed. All questions were in English but could be answered also in German, French, Spanish, and/or Russian. Out of the 40 respondents, two chose to answer in Russian. All others answered in English.

The survey consists of five sections of questions covering social identity, contextual identity, and stylistic identity (Crystal, 2010). Table 1 below sums up which questions address the three categories of identity. Social stance and social act (Ochs, 1993) are included in the category of social identity. The questions also represent the emergence principle (situational context), positionality principle (social subjectivity and attitude), and partialness principle (deliberate and intentional, choice of native and/or English language) (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). To find out more about the sociolinguistic aspects of language and academic identity, a qualitative online survey with lecturers and researchers was conducted. In April and May 2015, the survey with 39 questions was made available through the online survey tool Survey monkey.

Table 1: *Survey Questions and Categories of Identity*

Social Identity	Contextual Identity	Stylistic Identity
Q1: Frequency of using English at work	Q2: Work situations in which English is used	Q4: Languages of teaching
Q3: Situations in which English is used more often than native language	Q3: Situations in which English is used more often than native language	Q5: Differences in teaching
Q6: Attitudes to teaching in English	Q8: Difficulties in different situations	Q9: Examples of difficulties
Q7: Reasons for this attitude	Q31: Subject area of teaching	Q11: Languages of publishing

	and researching	
Q10: Languages important for research discourse	Q32: Country of work	Q21: Expected language competences of own English
Q12: Frequency of publishing in English in comparison to native language		Q22: Expected English language competences of colleagues
Q13: Advantages of publishing in English		Q23: Expected English language competences of students
Q14: Disadvantages of publishing in English		Q25: Attitudes to colleagues" English language mistakes
Q15: Advantages of publishing in native language		Q26: Attitudes to students" English language mistakes
Q16: Disadvantages of publishing in native language		Q27: Attitudes to own English language mistakes
Q17: Language preference for publishing		Q34: Level of English language proficiency
Q18: Reasons for this preference		Q36: Duration of formally learning English
Q19: Languages in which publications are read		Q37: Place of formally learning English
Q20: Frequency of use of English in reading research publications		
Q24: Attitudes to English language competences expected		
Q28: Variety of English aspired to		
Q29: Age		
Q30: Job title		
Q33: Native language		
Q35: Foreign language proficiency		
Q38: Gender		

Below the results are given for the questions on, first, contextual identity, second, on social identity, and, third, on stylistic identity. The figure in brackets after an answer refers to the number of respondents who gave that particular answer. For open ended questions, a qualitative content analysis was used as a method.

4.1 Contextual Identity

Contextual identity is based on setting, participants, and activity and includes channel, code, message form, and subject matter. In terms of the scientific community, the setting is based in classrooms and other workplaces at universities; the participants are lecturers, researchers, and students; and the activities comprise teaching, publishing, and activities connected to that.

English is used in many of the respondents‟ work situations in spoken and written discourse with students, colleagues, and research partners. Communication takes various forms, such as face-to-face conversations, classroom interaction, online communication, and publications. Teaching in English is done by all but one respondent, research in English is read by almost all respondents (36), publications in English are written by 33 respondents, communication with colleagues and communication with students in English is done by 32 respondents each, and English also plays a role in conferences (31), projects (30), and networking (27).

English is very much part of the respondents‟ work. Eighty-five per cent of respondents use English daily and the remaining 15 per cent several times a week. The important role English is underlined by the fact that English occurs more often than the native language in the following situations. The respondents claim to use English more in teaching (36), reading research (27), writing papers/articles/books (23), communications with colleagues (22), communication with students (21), conferences (18), projects (13), and networking (2). One informant uses English more in another context but did not specify which one, and one informant says that Russian is used more often.

Concerning the subject, the 40 respondents completing the survey come from various subject areas: business and economy (22), arts and humanities (9), natural sciences and technology (3), law (2), and medicine (1). Three respondents did not specify their subject.

4.2 Social Identity

Indicators for social identity include non-linguistic factors, such as age, gender, main place of work, and attitude to language as well as linguistic factors, like native language and choice of language. The respondents are international, bilingual or multilingual lecturers and researchers in the scientific community.

As far as age is concerned, 11 respondents each belong to age-groups 31-40 and 41-50.

Nine respondents are between 25-30, seven between 51-60, and two are aged 61-70. Twenty respondents are female, 20 are male. They mainly work in 14 different countries: Austria (11), Russia (5), Denmark (4), Ukraine (3), The Netherlands (3), Germany (3), Sweden (2), India (2), the UK (2), Slovenia (1), Mexico (1), France (1), Finland (1), and Saudi Arabia (1). Their native languages are German (16), Russian (8), Danish (3), Dutch (2), Hindi (2), Ukrainian (2), Norwegian (1), Croatian (1), Slovenian (1), Finnish (1), Romanian (1), Arabic (1), and English (1).

Social identity is also created by verbally displayed attitudes and emotions. The act of choosing English can be regarded as a verbally displayed attitude as the users create their identity in the scientific community with choosing to communicate in English. The choice is between English and native or other languages.

The attitudes towards English as the language for the scientific community are on the whole positive. Teaching in English is generally regarded as positive and is associated with comfort. English is seen as important for the subject area and as necessary for the students" future careers. Speaking English in the classroom is considered a positive challenge.

English is the accepted choice of language of the research community and is actually regarded as the most important language in research by far. All respondents but one mention English as the language considered important for research. English language publications feature in all of the respondents" research activities. All respondents read publications in English, and more than three quarters say that they use the English language more than native language publications.

English is the most popular language choice for publishing one's own research. When asked in which languages they publish, 37 respondents ticked English, which equals more than 90 per cent. English is even used more often than the native language by 24 respondents, about the same as the native language by seven, and less than the native language by nine respondents. In percentages, it means that, for 60 per cent, English is the preferred language choice.

The reason for why English is the most popular language is the wider international readership. More people can read the research publications without the need to translate into local languages. There are also some associations with prestige in the scientific community. There is more visibility of research and increased international relevance for the researcher, and

the highest ranked journals are published in English. The English language is "state of the art, the standard" (Respondent 22).

However, not all respondents like teaching in English. Lacking language competences and the effort required to teach in English take away some of the comfort. One respondent considers the use of English by non-native speakers as weakening the English language, another says that more effort is required as words might be lacking, and one respondent prefers talking to students in their shared native language.

The negative attitudes to publishing in English concern mainly language competences. Writing in a language that is not a researcher's native language might pose some problems. Finding the right words, avoiding mistakes and expressing nuances are some of the concerns the respondents raised. Non-native speakers are at a clear disadvantage in the review process. Three respondents mention the connection of thought and language: "might constrain perspectives. Leads to diluted communication" (Respondent 18), "thoughts might be influenced or bound by the English language" (Respondent 16), and "I think that language is linked to culture and specific world views, so I think it's important for researchers to go on publishing in their mother language. If we publish only in English, we may limit our creativity"(Respondent 13).

The attitude towards the native language is also part of social identity. The native languages of the respondents are connected with better quality of writing, to different research traditions, and to a national audience. Some respondents prefer publishing in their native languages as it is easier and more comfortable for them. Two respondents reflect on their stylistic identity in English: "expressing subtle nuances" (Respondent 19), and "the variety and the richness" of the native language are difficult to achieve (Respondent 35).

Native languages and other languages are seen important for the research process but less so than English. The languages used depend on individual language skills. As languages seen important for research, the respondents mention German, Russian, French, Dutch, Finnish, Spanish, Italian, Chinese, and "all of them" (Respondent 36). Yet, languages other than English are mentioned in the survey much less frequently than English.

As far as reading research is concerned, other languages are used, too, though much less than English: Spanish, German, French, Russian, Swedish, Danish, Ukrainian, Norwegian, Finnish, Dutch, Italian, Slovenian, Croatian, Serbian, and Armenian. While Chinese is also

mentioned as an important language for research, none of the respondents has actually used it in researching.

For publishing, native languages or other languages are less popular than English, though they are also used. Languages of publications are German, Spanish, Russian, Ukrainian, Danish, French, Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, Slovenian, Croatian, and Serbian.

Some respondents do not see any advantages in publishing in their native languages. They have never or rarely written in their native languages and would feel uncomfortable with publishing in their native languages. Additionally, as the readership is national, research has lower visibility and might even have less prestige.

4.3 Stylistic Identity

Stylistic identity examines factors, such as formal characteristics, size and diversity of vocabulary, and single words. In this study, competences of students and lecturers, difficulties in English, expected English language competences, and model of English aspired to are considered stylistic identity.

To describe the level of the respondents" English language competence, the respondents were asked to assess themselves based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2014). The majority of respondents are proficient users on levels C2 (21) and C1 (15). Four respondents are independent users on levels B2 (2) and B1 (2). The model of English the respondents aspire to is most of all British English (25) followed by American English (10). Five respondents claim that they do not aspire to any model.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2014) divides language competences into understanding, speaking, and writing. Understanding refers to listening and reading. The linguistic competences needed are subdivided into phonetics/phonology (pronunciation), lexis (vocabulary, expressions, and idiomatic expressions), syntax (grammar), and pragmatics (transmission of meaning in context).

For the respondents, the linguistic competences are of different importance. For their own English language competences, the respondents put the linguistic competences in the following order, ranked from most important to least important: first, correct lexis, second, correct syntax, third, phonetics, and, fourth, pragmatics. The respondents are quite strict as far as their own language mistakes are concerned. The majority of the respondents sees their own mistakes as

negative or wants to improve itself. The let it pass‟ and neutral attitudes are also displayed but much less than critical attitudes.

The respondents are less critical towards language mistakes made by others. The competences the respondents expect from their colleagues and students differ slightly according to the discourse situation. Pragmatic skills are seen as most important in conversation, and lexical skills in classroom situations, scientific publications, and online communication. Competences in syntax, though not seen as the most important competence, play an important role in written discourse. Mistakes are generally seen with the, let it pass‟ attitude or neutrally. Some respondents say that they simply correct the mistakes.

Yet, about a quarter of all respondents see their colleagues‟ and students‟ mistakes as negative. Language mistakes might even be considered as unprofessional: "[I] might consider them [colleagues] not very professional if they are in international management and can't speak English" (Respondent 36). Correct language "indicates also professionalism" (Respondent 31).

As far as language difficulties are concerned, the students‟ lack of competences and understanding each other‟s English are the main areas of concern. At the same time, about half of the respondents say that there are no difficulties.

The attitude to language mistakes differs between spoken and written discourse. In general, mistakes in writing are considered more serious than mistakes in speaking, and the „let it pass‟ attitude is not applied to written discourse.

5. Conclusion

EFL is both, a language of communication as well as a language of identification in the scientific community. While the use of EFL in teaching and publishing does not say much about lecturers‟ or researchers‟ cultural background, it identifies them as members of the scientific community.

The scientific community is like any other community with its own sociological aspects, concepts, values, roles, culture, and languages. English is the acknowledged language of the scientific community and has more status and prestige than other languages. English is the language that currently has the highest status, and, thus, lecturers and researchers choose English. With using English alongside their other languages, the lecturers and researchers attach

to themselves the image of successful, international, bilingual or multilingual members of the scientific community.

Which model of English is the most accepted or desired model is a question that still needs to be researched further. While ELF is a popular variety for spoken discourse, English as a native language is the desired variety for written discourse, such as journal publications. The difference between reality and expectations of language competences of the members of the scientific community also needs to be addressed in more detail.

This study is based only on a few members of the scientific community and is, thus, not representative for the whole community. What would need to be addressed in further research includes the issues of explaining further the differences between spoken and written discourse, the possible effect of the cultural background and subject area of the lecturer or researcher on their social status within the scientific community, implications for other members of the scientific community, and the possibly different image and attitude of native speakers of English as opposed to multilingual speakers with a professional command of ELF.

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