

# Studying in English as a Lingua Franca

## THE SELF PROJECT

[www.eng.helsinki.fi/elfa/self](http://www.eng.helsinki.fi/elfa/self)

### Introduction

English has become the global lingua franca of the academic world. English is the principal language of research publication, and the number of English-medium degree programmes has risen steeply. In these contexts, English is overwhelmingly used among non-native speakers. Its main role is a lingua franca, a contact language among speakers who do not share a first language.

To capture these linguistic developments, project SELF sets out to provide research-based evidence on present-day English as a lingua franca (ELF), with a focus on academic discourses in university settings.

The project is directed by Prof. Anna Mauranen at the University of Helsinki.

### Approach

Project SELF focuses on English-medium university studies. It takes a micro-analytic, ethnographically influenced perspective on the contexts of ELF, and seeks to combine linguistic analyses with participant experiences of and views on using English. To achieve this, data have been collected from interrelated speech events and interviews. The speech events are multiparty interactions where the participants represent a variety of lingua-cultural backgrounds. It is also typical that the speakers' proficiency levels vary. Since the speakers in the ELF situations use English as a medium of communication, the speakers are treated as *users* of English, rather than learners.

Project SELF complements the 1-million-word corpus of *English as a lingua franca in academic settings* (ELFA) compiled in the Universities of Helsinki and Tampere (see [www.eng.helsinki.fi/elfa/elfacorporus](http://www.eng.helsinki.fi/elfa/elfacorporus)).

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Photo: Veikko Somerpuro

### Data

#### Audio recordings of interrelated speech events

- English-medium university course interactions
- English-medium group work interactions
- Training course for English-medium teachers

#### Field notes to support the recordings

#### Written course material

- Course instructions
- Presentation slides
- Students' course work (e.g. learning diaries, exams)

#### Semi-structured interviews with participants of the speech events

- Students' and teachers' experiences of and views on studying/working in English
- Role of English in the participants' lives
- Comments on the speech events



#### ELFA Corpus and SELF team members

Front row, left to right: Maria Metsä-Ketelä, Elina Ranta, project director Prof. Anna Mauranen, Jaana Suviniitty, Pirjo Surakka-Cooper; Back row: Niina Hynninen, Anna Solin; missing from the picture: Diane Pilkinton-Pihko and our current assistants Ray Carey, Anni Holopainen and Marianne Hiirsalmi

#### Collaborators:

University of Helsinki Language Centre

#### Funding 2008–2010:

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### Research questions

1. How do speakers regulate their use of English in interaction? How do participants negotiate their linguistic differences arising from their diverse first-language backgrounds and their varying levels of proficiency?
2. What is participant experience of academic ELF discourses? How do students and teachers feel about and relate to the pursuit of academic activities using English in a non-English matrix culture? What spoken and written discourses do speakers mostly engage in, and how do they go about managing them in this multilingual environment?

### Sample transcript

The sample comes from a group work session among five students, who, in the extract, are discussing their presentation slides. S5: L1 Spanish, S2: L1 Brazilian Portuguese, S1: L1 Finnish.

```
S5: what's the reason that you have put (below) comment
changes with
S2: [(mhm)]
S1: [because] i i'm not sure if that is used like before
it's more like now they are using it (and) like i
think that that the governments and researchers have
use(d) it like with this traditional methods mostly
and sometimes these development (a-) agencies because
the(re) haven't been so long time this <SIC>
developmenting </SIC> going [on ]
S5: [but erm] you you you must
er explain it tomorrow
S1: yeah [but ] is that okay [if i say it that way]
S5: [okay] [mhm-hm mhm-hm ]
S1: yeah i didn't write all the things i tried it to be
like really short
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### Significance

Project SELF serves theoretical and descriptive interests on issues of language change and new developments in English. By combining analyses of authentic ELF use with analyses of participant experiences, the project aims at a close-up view of the language practices in use, and seeks to uncover possible challenges faced by the participants.

The project also has applicational relevance, primarily in university contexts for the benefit of students and teachers in English-medium programmes. The purpose is to develop recommendations for future plurilingual professionals on how to better deal with ELF situations.