English as a lingua franca: an overview

El inglés como lengua franca: una visión general

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Abstract

In the various fields of communication, there is a need to use a common language that allows effective relationships to be established between speakers of different mother tongues, where English could be the ideal resource for being used globally and internationally. The objective of this work is to point out the concept of English as a lingua franca (ILF), with a greater vision of the two spaces where the use of this language has been more transcendental, and to reveal its three types of speakers categorized by their respective characteristic features. This study was motivated by the importance that communication has, particularly, between speakers whose mother tongue differs from one another. To develop the research, a systematic exploration of scientific articles has been carried out by examining various databases such as Google Scholar, Eric, Library Genesis among others, in the Spanish and English languages, without discrimination of dates or types of study. Literature has been included for findings by scientific survey. Abstracts and, where necessary, full articles have been explored, considering all articles that contain conceptualizations of English as a lingua franca, primarily. Among the most relevant articles have been chosen, English as a lingua Franca: description, domains and application; The discursive accomplishment of normality: On "lingua franca" English and conversation analysis; English as a lingua franca: A threat to multilingualism; English as a lingua franca in the international university: the politics of academic English language policy; among others. Studies on English as a lingua franca have made it possible to determine that the usefulness of this language in communication has a solid scientific basis. In business and higher education, the expansion of English throughout the world is shown, determining the countries that have English as their first language, as a second language, or as a foreign language.**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Metodología innovadora; enseñanza problémica; aprendizaje; Educación General Básica Superior

KEYWORDS: Lingua franca; mother tongue; communication; business; higher education.

Resumen

En los diversos campos de la comunicación existe la necesidad de utilizar una lengua común que permita establecer relaciones eficaces entre los hablantes de diferente lengua materna, donde el inglés, podría ser el recurso idóneo por ser empleado global e internacionalmente. El objetivo de este trabajo es puntualizar el concepto del inglés como lengua franca (ILF), con una mayor visión a los dos espacios donde el uso de esta lengua ha sido más trascendental, y revelar sus tres tipos de hablantes categorizados por sus respectivos rasgos característicos. Este estudio fue motivado por la importancia que la comunicación tiene, particularmente, entre hablantes cuya lengua materna difiere una de la otra. Para desarrollar la investigación, se ha llevado a cabo una exploración sistemática de artículos científicos examinando varias bases de datos como Google Académico, Eric, Library Genesis entre otras, en los idiomas español e inglés, sin discriminación de fechas ni de tipos de estudio. Se ha incluido literatura por hallazgos mediante sondeo científico. Se ha explorado los resúmenes y, en los casos necesarios, los artículos completos, considerándose todos los artículos que contienen conceptualizaciones de inglés como lengua franca, primordialmente. Entre los artículos más relevantes han sido escogidos, English as a lingua Franca: description, domains and application; The discursive accomplishment of normality: On "lingua franca" English and conversation analysis; English as a lingua franca: A threat to multilingualism; English as a lingua franca in the international university: the politics of academic English language policy; entre otros. Los estudios sobre el inglés como lengua franca han permitido determinar que la utilidad de este idioma en la comunicación tiene una base científica sólida. En los negocios y en la educación superior, se muestra la expansión del inglés en todo el mundo, determinando los países que tienen el inglés como primera lengua, como segunda lengua, o como lengua extranjera.

PALABRAS CLAVES: Lengua franca; lengua materna; comunicación; negocios; educación superior.

INTRODUCTION

Currently, English is the global and international language of communication in different contexts, such as technology, business, tourism, academia, research or entertainment. For Hynninen (2016), a lingua franca is so called because its function is to help speakers who do not share a mother tongue (L1) to communicate through a common language. In this sense, communication between two or more speakers allows establishing better interrelationships, maintaining English as a lingua franca (ILF).

In this article the concept of ILF will be defined in more detail. In addition, emphasis will be placed on two contexts in which the ILF has had greater relevance: the ILF of business (BELF, for its acronym in English, Business English as a Lingua Franca) and the ILF in higher education. Finally, the three types of English speakers and their main features that differentiate one from the other will be shown.

In simple terms, the lingua franca is that common language that the speakers use for communicative purposes when the same language is not shared. In general, speakers of different cultures and languages of one or different countries resort to this third language that does not correspond to the native language of any of these speakers (Firth, 1996).

Mauranen (2018, p.7) shares the same opinion:

The term lingua franca is normally used to mean a contact language, that is, a vehicular language between speakers who do not share a first language. While some lingua francas are pidgins or jargons that have no native speakers but arise in contact situations as a mixture of two separate languages, others are existing natural languages used for vehicular purposes.

The term lingua franca is positioned as a language to satisfy communicative needs or as a communication strategy, which is adopted by people with different mother tongues to, in this way, solve sociocultural problems (Sherman, 2018; Widdowson, 2018).

ILF is not new but has served as a lingua franca since the late 16th century in many countries that were colonized by the British Empire (Jenkins, 2000; Mauranen, 2012). There has been a notable increase in interest around the ILF phenomenon in recent years and, as a result, it has become a productive field of research that has found its place in discussions of applied linguistics and sociolinguistics.

Graddol (1997) lists the twelve fields in which English plays an internationally dominant role:

1.   Working language of international organizations and conferences.

2.   Scientific publication.

3.   International banking, economic affairs and trade.

4.   Advertising for global brands.

5.   Audio-visual cultural products (e.g., film, TV, popular music).

6.   International tourism.

7.   Tertiary education.

8.   International safety (e.g., "airspeak", "seaspeak")

9.   International law

10.   As a "relay language" in interpretation and translation.

11.   Technology transfer.

12.   Internet communication. (Graddol, 1997, p.8)

Crystal (2003) explains the usefulness and use of English as a means of communication in areas of growth in many aspects of daily life, listing the following domains of English in a global construct:

1.   International relations   7. Popular music

2.   The media   8. International travel

3.   The press   9. International safety

4.   Advertising   10. Education

5.   Broadcasting   11. Communications

6.   Cinema   (Crystal, 2003, pp. 86-114).

ILF researchers have been concerned with carrying out their investigations in different contexts, such as in domains of social contact, prioritizing those of business, education (whether in school or university environments), tourism, politics, technology and media (Jenkins, Cogo & Dewey, 2011).

The ILF represents a threat to multilingualism and, therefore, a distinction must be made between languages for communication and languages of identification. In relation to English as a language for communication, it is important to note that it is no longer the property of its native speakers, given that the number of speakers of that language is overwhelmingly higher in people who have it as a foreign or second language (NNS, Non-Native Speakers) (House, 2003). In addition, it must be recognized that English has a strong impact on other languages because it is the language of science and technology, as well as international degree programs in which English is the official language of instruction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review article is based on a systematic review of the literature. The review focuses on the conceptualization and applications of English as a lingua franca (ILF) in business and higher education contexts. An exhaustive search of scientific articles was carried out in several databases, including Google Scholar, Eric, Library Genesis and other academic sources in Spanish and English. No restrictions on dates or types of study were applied.

The selection of articles was carried out in several stages. First, searches were conducted using keywords related to ILF, business, and higher education. Abstracts of articles found were examined for relevance. In cases where the abstracts were relevant, the full articles were reviewed. Inclusion of the articles was based on their contribution to the conceptualization of ILF in business and higher education contexts. A qualitative analysis of the collected data was performed. The selected articles were subjected to a detailed review and the key concepts related to ILF in the mentioned contexts were extracted. The data was organized thematically to identify patterns and trends in the literature.

Copyrights were respected and all sources used in the review were properly cited. In addition, data integrity was guaranteed by using a transparent and systematic methodology in the article selection and analysis process.

An important limitation of this methodology was that it was based on the availability of online articles and the databases consulted. This could have led to the exclusion of some relevant sources that were not available online. Furthermore, since the review focused on the conceptualization of ILF in business and higher education contexts, some aspects specific to other contexts may not have been addressed in detail.

Talking about language as identification allows us to understand that the ILF is not a national language, but rather a collective cultural and economic tool that does not have to be part of linguistic imperialism (De Swaan, 2001). The identification language refers to the native language or regional language where the roots of its speakers are since the cultural tradition is found in it.

Jenkins (2011) points out that, in recent decades, English has become the dominant global lingua franca. Interest in this area began with a couple of seminal publications: the work of Jenkins (2000), an empirical study of phonology and related concepts of intelligibility and appropriateness to international contexts where English is used; and that of Seidlhofer (2010), who made more empirical descriptions of communication in ILF and effectively marked the basis of the VOICE (Vienna Oxford International Corpus of English), an oral corpus of ILF produced in natural circumstances.

Basically, the VOICE corpus, led by Seidlhofer, was the first ILF study to be conducted with recordings of close to a million English words produced by European professionals and educators in informal environments. At the time of recording, an estimated 1,250 lingua franca speakers with approximately 50 different native languages were chosen; this corpus is available on the Internet.

ILF is a flexible, co-constructed and, therefore, variable means of communication. Variability is built locally in different geographical areas and social spheres, but it is not necessarily geographically restricted, since virtual communities, distant from each other, can also develop communicative practices in ILF (Cogo, 2015; Jenkins, 2014; Mauranen, 2012). Based on these clarifications about English as a language of communication or identification and on the premise of the cited authors, the ILF should not be considered a threat to multilingualism; on the contrary, this language would be the connecting link between people of various cultures who have English as the language for common communication.

Regarding English as a language for communication, Björkman (2013) points out that in the 21st century this language has three main users as speakers: those who have it as first language, those who speak it as a second language or as an additional language, and those who have learned it as a foreign language (Björkman, 2013). This distinction helps to establish from what perspective studies related to English as a lingua franca are approached, due to the large number of people who speak it or use it as a work tool.

There is general agreement around ILF and BELF research that the English used for international communication purposes is not the same as that used locally by native speakers in their countries of origin (Ehrenreich, 2010). Most of the studies in this area confirm the general tendency to focus on the content of the message and understand business ideas, instead of putting accuracy in linguistic terms in the foreground. This author maintains that he has faced so many degrees of corrections that he does not care if something is correct or not, if the meaning is not distorted from what he wants to communicate.

In addition, Ehrenreich (2010) alludes to the fact that it is not uncommon for professionals to refer to the variation in linguistic competence among the people with whom they come into contact in the workplace. He adds that comments frequently include the ease or difficulty of accents, and native speakers tend to stand out as the most difficult interlocutors to understand (Rogerson-Revell, 2008; Sweeney & Zhu, 2010).

Studies exploring business discourse, particularly through the analysis of natural linguistic data taken in contexts in which the BELF is used, have also shown that communication in BELF is inherently cross-cultural; and, for that, business professionals must be able to deal not only with multiple backgrounds and identities, but also with different ways of operating or acting in various business cultures (Kankaanranta and Planken, 2010).

ILF's research has also spread to encompass academia. So much so that it is known worldwide that English has become the communication vehicle for research and advanced postgraduate training (Mauranen, Pérez-Llantada, & Swales, 2010). The reality of the university is that it has always been international since its inception (Mauranen, Hynninen and Ranta, 2010). By the mere fact of maintaining relations with other universities abroad, it already obtains such an international category.

The globalization of education is an indisputable fact, even more so when it is dealt with in international environments. Regarding the internationalization of education, the importance of languages is a transcendental issue, and the language that has the highest proportion as a means of communication is English, to the point of giving it a unique status among all the languages used on our planet today as many academic and popular sources show and argue (Mauranen, Hynninen and Ranta, 2010). According to these authors, since universities seek the international market instead of the national one, English is one of the modern languages that is used not only in publications, but also for instruction.

As higher education becomes more international, benefiting from the mobility of teaching and research staff and students, the academic environment creates "a unique opportunity to investigate the complexities of language contacts of unforeseen complexity" (Mauranen, 2012, p.1). English is one of the languages that has crossed borders. This language is the only one of the modern languages that has positioned itself in history as a global lingua franca in countries where they have it as L1. This linguistic phenomenon is a consequence of political activities and other significant developments, which led to this language becoming a means of communication for various domains, among which is higher education (Björkman, 2013).

Due to globalization, and this being the cause of the expansion of English as a lingua franca, the university plays an important role. Björkman (2011) asserts that English is currently the main means of academic communication in Northern European universities, and that this has been, for a long time, the language of publications; at the same time, it has become the language of instruction in a high percentage of institutions across continental Europe and beyond.

Coleman (2006) provides relevant data regarding the use of English in the European context. This author states that in the last fifteen years the teaching of English in European universities has shown a substantial growth in the use of said language, mainly in master's degree programs, but the percentage of use grows in undergraduate programs. This same author assures that some universities in the Netherlands and Sweden used English as a teaching medium as early as the 1950s, and others such as Finland, Hungary and Norway followed suit from the 1980s. English really took off in the 1990s, both in Western Europe and in Central and Eastern Europe.

In the American context, Coleman (2006) states that most of the research carried out is published in the English language. He insists that due to globalization and the large influx of foreign students whose L1 is not English, there is more research every year on learning English as a foreign language. González (2008) shows data on the use of English in Colombian universities, arguing that the population can use English, mainly, in the most representative cities in terms of population, such as Bogotá, Medellín and Cali. This author mentions that there is an increase in the number of universities that have English as a medium of instruction in the preparation programs for teachers of this language. Additionally, González (2008) mentions that this language in higher education is growing drastically because it is the connection link with people from other academic

and cultural contexts. Since the 1990s, English has become much more important in Colombian university education, especially in those institutions that are interested in promoting internationalization. Universities encourage research and, with it, the learning of English because their programs require it. Universities that have a higher percentage of research programs demand as a requirement to be professors of any of their postgraduate programs that they have the communication skills of a foreign language, preferably English.

Regarding the ILF, Mauranen, Pérez-Llantada and Swales (2010) assert that, in academic contexts, this language has been adopted as a common language. They also state:

A variety of research methods are being used in these studies, from corpus methods to interviews, questionnaires, storytelling tasks and ethnography and discourse analysis; several studies combine more than one of these in order to understand discourse practices, discourse procedures and disciplinary cultures in academic settings (Mauranen, Pérez-Llantada & Swales, 2010, p. 641).

Other studies have investigated self-repetition, paraphrasing (Cogo, 2009; Lichtkoppler, 2007; Mauranen, 2012) and mediation (Hynninen, 2011), which are considered frequent strategies of academic discourse. Smith (2010) carried out an ethnographic study of classroom discourse exploring, among other things, meaning negotiation and repair strategies. These findings belong to the area of pragmatics, but more significant research has been carried out for lexicon-grammar where Ranta (2006) found the innovative use of progressive forms, as in the air we are breathing instead of the air we breathe, as indicative of a new function: drawing attention to the remark the speaker is making. Metsä-Ketelä (2006) also concludes that the use of more or less in academic spoken discourse assumes a minimizing function that is only present in ILF discourse.

By emphasizing the relationship between syntax and intonation, Björkman (2013) underlines the importance of questioning to ensure effective communication in the academic environment. Her study, carried out at a Swedish university, also explores attitudes towards non-standard language. Björkman points out that the lack of standardization, with a tendency towards explicitness, is not perceived as irritating or incomprehensible by participants.

In terms of attitudes and ideologies, ILF scholars have studied language policy in relation to English in so-called "international" universities and other educational settings that use English as a medium of instruction. Recent work by Jenkins (2014) contains a compelling critique of international universities, that students must conform to "national" norms, that is, inner circle varieties (Figure 1). United Kingdom and United States in the use of English, as international students are required to adapt to national standards, while locals are rarely required to learn to adapt to them. This is evident in the native norm-based exam guidelines for university admissions; and in the voices of the non-native students themselves, who, in Jenkins' (2014) interviews show the extent to which their academic performance is measured by the native norm, and how often they comment that the additional difficulty they find in their courses taught in English is not understood.

Outside of the student environment, the lingua franca-related debate in academic scenarios refers more specifically to the writing of research publications and the publishing practices of academics working outside of the English-speaking world. This is a widely debated topic that cuts across standard English, monolingualism and native speaker ideologies (Ingvarsdóttir & Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2013; Jenkins, 2011).

In the classroom context, for example, the role of the student can dominate over any other; but, outside of it, other social parameters may be more relevant. Similarly, in the workplace, people can alternate their roles

as learners and users. These roles are not "simple and constant but are assumed according to the situation" (Mauranen, 2012, p. 5), and often interact with considerations of attitudes and identities. As Hasman (2004, p. 18) expresses:

The world is in various stages of social, economic, and demographic transition. Economically and politically, the world has changed more rapidly in the past few years than at any time since 1945. The emerging global economy is both competitive and interdependent. It reflects the availability of modern communications and production technologies in most parts of the world.

The following table shows the main findings in ILF research carried out in academic environments by leading researchers and academics.

Table 1. Main findings on ILF in academic environments.

MORPHOSYNTAX		
Devices that increase comprehensibility and create extra explicitness	Double comparatives and superlatives	(Björkman, 2009/2011).
	Unraised negation	(Björkman, 2009, 2011).
	Vocabulary-related explicitness	(Seidlhofer, 2004).
Reductions of redundancy	Not marking the plural on the noun	(Björkman, 2008).
	Subject-verb agreement issues	(Seidlhofer, 2004).
	Non analytic comparative	(Björkman, 2010).
Other nonstandardness	Non-standard question formulation	(Björkman, 2009, 2010, 201).
	Tense and aspect	(Ranta, 2006). (Kirkpatrick, 2008). (Björkman, 2010).
	Article usage	(Seidlhofer, 2004). (Björkman, 2011).
PRAGMATICS		
Pragmatic fluency	1. Appropriate use of routine pragmatic phenomena	(House, 1999).
	2. Ability to initiate topics and topic change, making use if appropriate routines	
	3. Ability to "carry weight" in a conversation	
	4. Ability to show turn-taking, replying/responding	
	5. Appropriate rate of speech, types of filled and unfilled pauses, frequency and function of repairs	
Metadiscourse	Metadiscourse	(Mauranen 2005a, 2005b, 2006a, 2007).
	Rephrasing and repetition	(Mauranen 2005a, 2005b, 2006a, 2007). (Cogo and Dewey, 2006). (Lichtkoppler, 2007). (Kaur, 2008). (Björkman, 2009, 2010, 2011).

Explicit negotiation of the topic	(Mauranen 2005a, 2005b, 2006a, 2007). (Björkman, 2010, 2011).
Signaling discourse structure prospectively	(Björkman, 2009, 2010, 2011). (Kaur, 2009). (Mauranen, 2006a). (Penz, 2008).
Signaling discourse structure retrospectively	(Björkman, 2009, 2010, 2011). (Kaur, 2009). (Mauranen, 2006a). (Penz, 2008).
Backchanneling	(Björkman, 2011).
The practice of mediation	(Hynninen, 2011).
Managing conflicts	(Knapp, 2011).
Modal verbs and evidentiality	(Mortensen, 2008).
Ownership and maintenance issues	(Haberland, 2011).
	PHONOLOGY
Lingua franca core	(Jenkins, 2000).
Attitudes towards ELF	(Jenkins, 2007).
Intelligibility and comprehensibility	(Pickering, 2006).
Teaching ELF pronunciation	(Walker, 2010).
Question intonation	(Björkman, 2011).

Source: (Björkman, 2011).

In short, in a globalized world, the English language is the means by which all speakers, regardless of their L1 level, can communicate more easily with others academically.

One fact that has academics and researchers alike is how the global lingua franca of academia, English, is used far more by non-native speakers than by native speakers (Mauranen, Hynninen, & Ranta, 2010). This means, according to Hülmbauer, Böhringer and Seidlhofer (2008), that English is not the property of its native speakers, but a universal and democratic language due to its exolingual process.

Undoubtedly, the growth of English speakers and, therefore, the expansion of its use, has its advantages, both for students and for teaching and research staff at universities. One of these advantages is evident in the exchange of students, university staff and job opportunities. Tertiary education in science and technology is becoming stronger every day, since that language is the language of scientific publications and activities. All these advantages mean that universities and technical institutes are responding to the demand of students and industry to implement English as the language of instruction in tertiary education in their programs (Björkman, 2013).

According to Graddol (1997), there are three types of English speakers. The first are those who have it as their first language (L1) and which is often the only language they speak. These mostly native speakers live in countries where the dominant culture is tied to English. The second are those speakers who have English as a second language (ISL). The third parties are speakers who learn it as a foreign language (ILE), whose group is made up of a growing number of people.
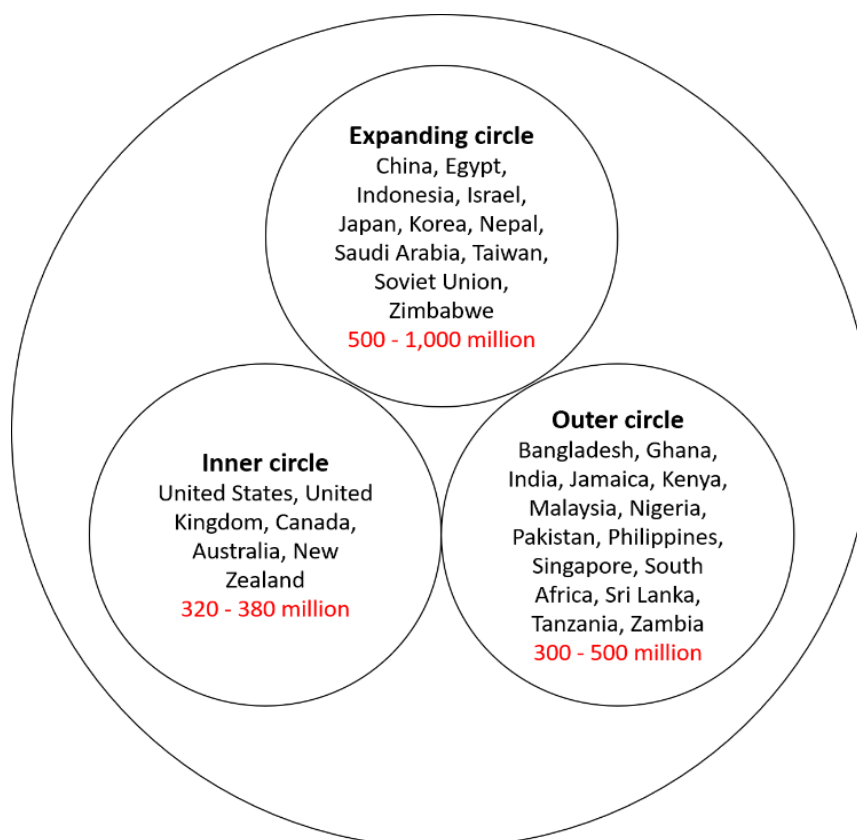

Figure 1. The three circles of English (adapted from Kachru, 1985/1996, p.137) with estimates in numbers of speakers according to Crystal (2003).

Source: Kachru, 1985/1996; Crystal, 2003.

To better understand the globalization of English, it is relevant to show the perspective that Kachru raised in 1985, and restated in 1996, about the spread of English throughout the world. This author regionalized, so to speak, the countries that have English as their first language, as a second language, or as a foreign language.

According to Crystal (2003), Kachru suggested the spread of English by categorizing it into "zones", properly concentric circles, which represent the different ways in which that language has been acquired and its current use. Crystal is aware that Kachru's (1985, 1996) proposal is valid; however, she asserts that not all countries fit into such a division (Figure 2). First, in the inner circle, are the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The inner circle emphasizes the traditional foundations of English, including those countries where English is L1 (Crystal, 2003; Richards & Schmidt, 2010). Second, the expanding circle includes those countries that recognize the importance of English as an international language, although they do not have a history of colonization by members of the inner circle, that is, they have not granted them any special administrative status (Crystal, 2003).

Countries such as China, Egypt, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Korea, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, the Soviet Union, and Zimbabwe are observed in this circle. Finally, the outer or extended circle includes the earliest phases of the spread of English in non-native settings, where the language plays an important role as a second language in a multilingual environment (Crystal, 2003). The countries that meet this characteristic are Bangladesh, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, and Zambia.

In general, it can be observed that the different types of speakers of the English language come from the expansion that this language has had in different countries and that it is used as a native language, as a second language, or as a foreign language.

CONCLUSIONS

English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) has made communication one of the best options in different fields such as business, tourism, employment, etc., facilitating trade, commerce, and cultural exchange.

ELF focuses on the language teaching which has led to a shift in focus from teaching grammar and vocabulary to teaching communication skills. EFL encourages teachers to use English with a more commutative perspective in the classroom.

English as a lingua franca has become increasingly predominant in higher education. Mainly in non-English speaking countries. For instance, EFL in higher education has implications for linguistic diversity and language management. EFL makes emphasis the use of English in more specific areas; for example, English for Academic Purposes (EAP).

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