

Abstract

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This thesis sets out to contribute to the empirical research into English as a lingua franca (ELF), i.e. English used between people who do not speak one another's native language.

ELF is often represented as a language use which is primarily transactional in function in that it serves as a means for the 'utilitarian' exchange of information. The examination of informal ELF conversations among Vietnamese and Austrian speakers reveals that this is a somewhat limited view. The analysis of these data, compiled in a small-scale corpus, provides evidence that ELF also serves an interactional function in that it is used phatically for the establishment and maintenance of positive interpersonal relationships.

The theoretical framework for the analysis is provided by an overview of different functional approaches to language, a critical discussion of Malinowski's notion of phatic communion, and draws on insights from ethnomethodology and conversation analysis.

The analysis of the data not only indicates the general phatic functioning of ELF but also shows, more specifically, that agreement tokens and repetition are two formal features which function to establish affective convergence between the participants in phatic ELF talk. The outcomes of the analysis are compared with features of phaticity in native - native interactions and with widely acknowledged characteristics of ELF talk.