The field of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) is a rapidly growing one as attested by the number of research studies and publications on the subject in recent years. To date a range of phenomena has been investigated including the variability of English when used as a lingua franca, the practices and strategies employed by successful users of ELF, and creativity in ELF usage. Empirical findings on the use of ELF have led to in-depth, and sometimes controversial, discussions on the need for the reconceptualization of English, questioning of the ownership of English by its native speakers, and a consideration of the implications of ELF findings for ELT, amongst others (see, for example, Jenkins, Cogo, and Dewey 2011; Seidlhofer 2011).

The subject of misunderstanding in ELF is one of particular interest in the field and is the central theme of *Misunderstandings in English as a Lingua Franca*. The book, which comprises seven chapters, focuses on three related issues, namely, the causes of misunderstanding in ELF interactions, the measures speakers take to resolve misunderstandings when they occur, and those that they employ to prevent misunderstanding from the outset. In identifying the causes of misunderstanding at the various linguistic levels—phonological, lexical, and grammatical—Deterding sets out to determine the factors that both promote and hinder the intelligibility of speech in ELF.

In what is a very brief introductory chapter to the book, Deterding outlines the scope of his data-based study. In the main, Deterding sets out to build on Jenkins’ (2000) work on ELF phonology, namely, to determine the extent to which the phonological features both inside and outside the Lingua Franca Core (LFC) impact the intelligibility of speech in ELF and contribute to misunderstanding, or otherwise. Using the Brunei component of the Asian Corpus of English (ACE) as data, Deterding examines the interactions of speakers from nine different national backgrounds (p. 9), thus extending Jenkins’ original study of speakers of only two national backgrounds (ibid.: 84). He further extends his study to also include an investigation of the lexical and grammatical features that similarly impact intelligibility and lead to misunderstanding in ELF.

In Chapter 2, Deterding discusses some of the key concepts that relate directly to his study, starting with the term ‘English as a Lingua Franca’ itself, which he further examines in relation to World Englishes. Other concepts that Deterding provides a brief overview of include the LFC, Intelligibility, Misunderstanding, Repair, Accommodation, and Conversation Analysis. Deterding adopts a rather broad definition of ‘misunderstanding’, which includes not only situations where something the speaker says is misinterpreted but also where something the speaker says is not understood by the listener. Further, Deterding does not confine misunderstanding to only those that are displayed in the data in the form of some degree of communication breakdown but also includes instances where no such breakdown is apparent and the conversation is in fact seen to progress smoothly. The methodology that he adopts makes this possible and allows for many more instances of misunderstanding to be detected.

What is interesting about Deterding’s study is his inclusion of the participants of the study in the transcription and analysis process of the data, which is described in Chapter 3. A total of nine recordings from the Brunei component of ACE, amounting to six-and-a-half hours of spoken data, were examined for instances of misunderstanding. Deterding, however, does not provide very many details of the data collection itself, particularly with regard to the nature of the conversations, the topics covered, and the like. Involving the participants in the data transcription and analysis, however, allowed many misunderstandings that were masked by silences and the use of minimal backchannels...
to be unearthed. A total of 147 instances of misunderstanding, involving 183 tokens, were thus identified, far higher than has been reported in any other study. The misunderstandings were then attributed to a problem in pronunciation, grammar, or lexis, or a combination of the factors.

An important finding of Deterding’s study, which has implications for ELT, is that an overwhelming number of misunderstandings in his data involve pronunciation, i.e. 158 tokens from a total of 183 (86.3 per cent). Deterding provides detailed analyses of the various features of pronunciation that contribute to misunderstanding in Chapter 4. Working with a much larger corpus of misunderstandings than Jenkins, i.e. 158 tokens compared with 40, Deterding examines if the features that constitute the LFC are in fact essential for intelligibility and if those excluded might still contribute to misunderstanding. Regardless of the differences in setting, the national and linguistic background of the participants, and the research design itself, Deterding’s findings support the LFC proposals with a few exceptions that relate to unaspirated initial voiceless plosives, vowel length, and utterance stress. Deterding also briefly examines the extent to which the participants accommodate to their interlocutors both in speaking and listening and concludes that speakers of ELF sometimes lack awareness of their own pronunciation problems and thus are unable to rectify them.

In Chapter 5, Deterding examines the misunderstandings in his data that arise from lexical usage and grammar, which contribute to 22.4 per cent and 13.7 per cent, respectively, of the 183 tokens of misunderstandings identified. Deterding provides all examples of these misunderstandings accompanied by clear and detailed explanation. The use of unfamiliar lexical items and phrases, idioms, words with shifted meaning and polysemes, as well as non-standard grammar that relates to singular/plural nouns, articles, the –s and –ed verb suffixes, word order, and prepositions can all lead to misunderstanding; nevertheless, unlike pronunciation, they do not appear to cause major problems in understanding. An interesting point to note is that while code-switching has been found to facilitate effective communication in ELF as one type of accommodation strategy (for example Cogo 2009), Deterding illustrates how this same practice can also contribute to misunderstanding with several examples from his data. This, however, may in part be due to the fact that in Deterding’s study, unlike Cogo’s, the participants were strangers and thus, in all likelihood, lacked knowledge of the languages known to the interlocutor; a switch to an unknown code could therefore lead to problems in understanding.

In addition to a meticulous investigation of the causes of misunderstanding, Deterding also examines the strategies the participants employ to prevent and deal with misunderstandings in Chapter 6. Interestingly, silence was the response most favoured when faced with a problem in understanding, followed by the use of minimal backchannels. This indicates that the participants are inclined to adopt the ‘let-it-pass’ strategy (Firth 1996), rather than interrupt the flow of conversation to initiate repair. Other manifestations of this strategy noted include responding to a problem of understanding with laughter, change of topic, or a shift of focus to the segment of talk that is understood. Engaging the participants in the transcription and analysis process reveals the extent to which the participants opt to let a problem pass in favour of uninterrupted talk. Perhaps the fact that these were first-time encounters involving non-consequential talk (as the extracts suggest) contributed to this.

In the final chapter, Deterding explores the implications that the findings of his study have for ELT, with particular emphasis on the teaching of pronunciation and accommodation. Keeping in mind the less than positive reactions of many teachers to the idea of ELF-based teaching thus far, Deterding makes a case for the need to develop intelligible speech amongst learners. In this regard, knowledge of the factors that promote as well as hinder intelligibility, which the findings of the study shed light on, is crucial. Additionally, Deterding encourages teachers to focus on raising learners’ awareness of any problems with their pronunciation and to equip them with the skills and strategies to address these problems as a means of developing their ability to perform phonetic accommodation, which is essential in ELF communication. As eight of the nine participants were Asian, Deterding’s findings may have particular relevance to ELT practitioners in this region.

English as an Academic Lingua Franca, which focuses on the morphosyntactic and pragmatic features of ELF, complements Deterding’s work to provide a comprehensive picture.
of ELF. Specifically, Björkman sets out to investigate several aspects related to ELF usage in an academic setting, namely, form, communicativeness, and attitudes. The study is based on a large data set comprising a little over 42 hours of lecture recordings and about 28 hours of group work sessions on to which both extensive and intensive analyses were conducted, in addition to a survey designed to determine the perceived communicativeness of attitudes towards non-standard morphosyntactic forms. The book, which is divided into six chapters, not only provides detailed analyses of the data and in-depth discussions of the results but also takes the reader through some very pertinent issues arising from the position of English as a global lingua franca and the debates surrounding the subject.

In Chapter 1, Björkman provides the background to her study: first, tracing the development of English from the 19th century to its present position as the global lingua franca and then, focusing on the role of English in the scientific and technical domains. Björkman is thorough in describing the rise of English as the language of scientific research and publication and the reactions and responses that this development has aroused. Given that the site of the study is a technical institution of higher learning in Sweden, Björkman also provides a detailed account of the status and role of English in higher education, first in continental Europe and then more specifically in Sweden. Throughout, Björkman displays cognisance of the concerns that scholars have regarding the impact that English may have on national languages and learning and provides a balanced assessment of the situation.

Following a comprehensive introductory chapter, Björkman provides an overview of relevant studies of ELF in Chapter 2. The studies are categorized into two strands based on the absence/presence of normative elements, namely, those focused on pragmatics (normative elements absent) and those focused on form (normative elements present). Björkman is meticulous in her review of the selected studies, giving prominence to findings that relate directly or indirectly to her own study. In addition, Björkman considers studies that explore the inter-relationship between form and pragmatics such as that by Cogo and Dewey (2006) as well as those that investigate attitudes towards non-standard language.

Following Mauranen (2012), Björkman has chosen an academic setting in which to study the use of ELF in high stakes events as academia is increasingly becoming international by definition. A detailed description of the site—an international university in Sweden—is provided in Chapter 3. Björkman also provides a clear outline of the methodology employed both in the collection and analysis of her data. Adopting a ‘two-phase design’ (p. 66), encompassing both quantitative and qualitative procedures, provided the kind of data needed to shed light on both the form and discourse of academic ELF. The spoken data were obtained from a total of 60 participants, both students and lecturers, from 19 different first language backgrounds, thus ensuring a wide representation of linguacultural backgrounds coming in contact in a typical ELF setting. On the question of the perceived communicativeness of attitudes towards non-standard morphosyntactic forms, data were obtained via a survey.

In Chapter 4, Björkman presents the main results of her analysis in three parts covering form, communicativeness, and attitudes. In the form dimension, Björkman highlights the commonalities in the participants’ usage of non-standard morphosyntactic forms involving, for instance, plural marking, the article, tense, subject–verb agreement, question formation, and word order, amongst others. Björkman also finds the occurrence of non-standard forms to be relatively low with the use of standard forms being much more common. In the communicativeness dimension, Björkman reveals the lack of overt communicative disturbances in her data and finds the non-standard formulation of questions to be the only feature to affect communicative effectiveness, a matter which is given detailed attention. At the discourse level, the frequency with which selected pragmatic strategies are used, together with numerous examples of the strategies in use, is presented. Finally, after a brief discussion of the survey results, Björkman provides a helpful summary of the results by revisiting the research questions posed early on in the book.

An in-depth discussion of the findings and a consideration of the theoretical and practical implications of these findings are covered in Chapter 5. As in Chapter 4, the findings are discussed according to the three main themes which are form, communicativeness, and attitudes. With regard to form, an important finding is that speakers of English in lingua franca settings display tendencies towards ‘reducing redundancy and increasing explicitness’ which
can be attributed to ‘the demands of functional communication’ (p. 150), a phenomenon also noted in research on World Englishes, creoles, and learner language. On the issue of communicativeness, Björkman stresses the significance of question formulation—not just in terms of syntax but intonation as well—in ensuring effective communication in the chosen setting. Further, the participants’ use of various pragmatic strategies contributes to not only enhancing communicative effectiveness but also reducing communicative disturbances in spite of the presence of non-standard morphosyntactic features. A final point pertains to attitudes towards non-standard language whereby Björkman notes that non-standardness deriving from a move towards explicitness is perceived as neither irritating nor incomprehensible by the participants.

Björkman considers the theoretical implications of her findings in relation to the status of ELF, the norms and standards of spoken English, and what constitutes ‘good’ English. In the case of the former, Björkman addresses four pertinent questions about ELF, which have been debated in the literature, namely, whether ELF speakers are to be considered learners, whether ELF usage is to be considered learner language, whether ELF is to be considered sui generis, and finally, whether ELF is to be considered a variety of English. Björkman is to be commended for dealing with these questions in a thorough and balanced manner. Björkman also considers the practical implications of her findings on various parties—content lecturers, decision-makers, and teachers of English—providing each with constructive suggestions on how to enhance the communicative effectiveness of ELF in an academic setting.

In the concluding chapter—Chapter 6—Björkman begins by providing a summary of the study before highlighting the main contribution of the book, which is in describing ‘the effective speaker’ (p. 200) in an academic ELF setting, namely, one who displays pragmatic ability and fluency, regardless of language proficiency. Björkman also touches on the implications of her findings for native speakers of English which, in the main, involves the need for a shift in mindset and a readiness to make adjustments to their ways of speaking and listening when communicating in ELF settings. In the final section of the chapter, Björkman discusses the implications that the findings have for the internationalization of higher education and language policy practices. While there is a general tendency to equate internationalization with English-medium universities, Björkman is convincing in discounting the threat that English is said to pose for local languages and multilingualism.

Both Deterding and Björkman, while focusing on different aspects and adopting different approaches and methodologies, provide further insights into the phenomenon of ELF. Their books are likely to be of great interest to scholars and students engaged in research on ELF or any aspect of non-native speaker use of English, administrators, and academics in higher education, policymakers, and language teachers as well as any party directly or indirectly involved in the business of English language teaching and learning. While Deterding’s book has perhaps greater practical relevance for ELT practitioners, particularly in the teaching of pronunciation, Björkman’s book provides teachers with insights into ELF use that have implications for current practices and approaches to ELT.

References

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International Education Policy in Japan in an Age of Globalisation and Risk

R. W. Aspinall (ed.)
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Japan may be one of the most notorious countries in the world of ELT because it is often said that its people’s proficiency in speaking English has never been improved in spite of the introduction of a series of new English education policies over recent decades. Goodman, who provides a forward to Aspinall’s book, International Education Policy in Japan in an Age of Globalisation and Risk, describes the low level of spoken English as ‘One of the great mysteries of Japan’ (p. ix). This is the first book to analyse this mystery by scrutinizing the country’s ELT policies for internationalization and examining why they were issued, how they were implemented, and what effects were brought about.

Before going into each chapter, it is useful to offer a general evaluation of the book. This is useful both for those who have and those who do not have much experience with Japanese students to gain an overall picture of why many Japanese people have difficulty in speaking English. As it provides detailed descriptions of policymaking, and their historical, socio-political, and economic backgrounds, we can see why the series of ELT policies has neither succeeded in improving students’ proficiency in spoken English nor their willingness to have conversations in English. This holistic account of the Japanese ELT system convinces us that the formulation of ELT policies is influenced by various issues related to the national interest, and thus without recognizing them it is not possible to fully understand what is happening in English language classrooms.

International Education Policy in Japan is divided into seven chapters in addition to an Introduction and Conclusion. The Introduction explains reasons why international education policy in Japan has failed to prepare students for communication in English. One reason given is that Japanese ELT has heavily relied on yakudoku, or grammar-translation, and this is so dominant because of paper-based university entrance exams which communicative language teaching (CLT) has not yet succeeded in replacing. Aspinall then discusses four points that cannot be ignored if policymakers and teachers want to make ELT effective: one