

Language and Business Engineering Students' Attitudes to English as a Lingua Franca in Wallonia

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English is one of the most frequently used languages in international business communication today. It is overwhelmingly used as a lingua franca (ELF) by users whose mother tongue is not English or between native and non-native speakers of English (Seidelhofer 2001, Jenkins 2007). University students in non-English speaking countries often take classes in English as part of their programmes. This paper focuses on some of these students' perception of ELF.

In a quantitative study Xu and Van de Poel (2011) explored the attitudes of 69 Flemish undergraduate students of English (at the University of Antwerp, Belgium) towards ELF using a questionnaire survey. Their more specific aim was to investigate how university language students "perceive the role of English as a lingua franca through their experiences of engagement with English, both within and outside the academic community" (Xu & Van de Poel 2011: 263). The questions in the survey centred, among others, around the students' own use of English (at university, outside university, and with native speakers), their opinion on the importance of English (e.g. in Flanders, for European citizens...), their opinion about the ownership of English and varieties of English, their feelings about interactions with native/non-native interlocutors and their views on ELF communication.

The study reported on here takes Xu and Van de Poel's investigation as a starting point to examine the attitudes towards English as a lingua franca of French-speaking postgraduate students who are about to finish their studies and enter the world of work. We also set out to explore the possible impact of MA degree scheme on the students' attitudes. A slightly revised version of Xu and Van de Poel's survey was administered to 118 postgraduate students at the Université catholique de Louvain (in Wallonia, Belgium). These Master's students, who all have at least one English module as part of their programme, can be divided into three groups depending on their degree scheme: students of Modern Languages (English is one of their majors and there is considerable emphasis on accuracy), students of Business Engineering (a programme with a very strong emphasis on management) and students of Multilingual Business Communication (a programme which combines specialized spoken and written business communication classes in two modern languages, corporate communication and economics). The quantitative analysis is complemented with a more qualitative investigation based on semi-structured interviews with five students, which provides a deeper insight into some of the students' feelings and opinions about the role of English in Belgium and ELF as a new variety of English.

References

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