Exploring idiomatic creativity in English as a global language

Marie-Luise Pitzl, *Creativity in English as a Lingua Franca: Idiom and Metaphor*. Boston: Mouton De Gruyter, 2018. Pp. xiii + 288. Hardback £91.00, ISBN 978-1-5015-1688-7

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Research on English as a lingua franca (ELF) has evolved remarkably as a linguistic subdiscipline over the past two decades, gaining importance and popularity in an increasingly multilingual world. Pitzl's book enriches this line of research by exploring how one conventional part of English is vigorously adapted in intercultural communication. Based on the *Vienna–Oxford International Corpus of English* (VOICE) data, it investigates linguistic creativity in the use of idiom and metaphor in spoken ELF. This monograph, given its wide-ranging data collection, valuable theoretical insights and formal-functional approaches, is a worthy addition to advancing studies of English as a global language.

The book consists of a short introduction and eight chapters. Following the research background established in the Introduction, Chapter 1 brings in the two main issues addressed in this book: ELF and linguistic creativity. The author points out the 'hybrid' nature of ELF, and reveals its inherent variability as an original thrust for creativity to take place. A form-focused definition of linguistic creativity is then put forward to highlight the necessity of norms for conceptualizing creativity. The author makes a further distinction between norm-following and norm-transcending creativity. While the former refers to creative linguistic realizations that stay within the normative systems they originate from, the latter covers those that extend beyond the boundaries of existing norms and stretch current conventions (see also Pitzl, 2012). This distinction helps associate the topic of creativity with ELF. It is claimed that creativity, as an 'essential driving force of language change' (p. 38), offers a welcoming entry point into describing and analyzing the central characteristic of variation in ELF.

Chapter 2 concretizes 'creativity in ELF' by focusing on idiom and metaphor. The author reviews relevant literature, and more impressively, coordinates metaphor and 'idiomatic creativity' (see Langlotz, 2006; Prodromou, 2007) with a number of innovative ideas. For instance, a synchronic-diachronic link is found between idiom and metaphor. As a shared linguistic resource, it is the semantic dimension of metaphor that serves to motivate various uses of idioms in ELF. Following this logic, the author delineates the core processes of dynamic idiom re-creation, formulating 're-metaphorization' as a principal mechanism to 're-awaken' dormant metaphors and 're-enliven' conventional idioms (p. 72). In order to synthesize the theoretical part, this chapter concludes with a framework for interpreting linguistic creativity in ELF idiom usage.

Chapter 3 proceeds to the author's empirical investigation of creativity in ELF. It provides explicit descriptions of her research methodology and of VOICE. Concerning VOICE per se, focus is placed on those features that are rarely seen in non-ELF corpora, including the ethnographic dimension of data collection and the conversational details of the transcripts. The author specifies how she manually annotated the creative idioms and metaphors, so as to justify the 'qualitative' method that she adopted as a VOICE compiler. In concert with the book's interest in both a descriptive approach and one rooted in pragmatics, this chapter also stresses the importance of analyzing both creative linguistic forms and communicative functions in ELF.

Chapters 4 to 7 constitute a VOICE-based qualitative study of creative idioms and metaphors in ELF. Each chapter, with a rich supply of data, pinpoints a specific aspect of analysis. Chapter 4 concentrates on the forms of creative idioms. Three distinctive types of idiom variation (i.e., lexical substitution, syntactic and morpho-syntactic variation) are identified and illustrated with

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long lists of examples. Yet, the author admits that the boundaries between the three should not be thought as invariably clear-cut. While some variants might be derived from more than one English idiom (e.g., *pave the ground*), others could simultaneously cover several types of variation (e.g., *move along this road*). Despite these ambiguities, this chapter calls into question the long-lasting view of idioms as frozen lexical units, as it seems highly untenable in ELF contexts.

Chapter 5 delves into the pragmatic dimension of creative idioms. Drawing on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics paradigm, this chapter distinguishes two major functions of idiom variation in ELF settings. One is labelled 'interactional' function, including joking, maintaining rapport, mitigating face-threatening events, etc. The other one subsumes 'transactional' functions, such as summarizing, emphasizing and increasing explicitness. Noticeably, many creative idioms are multifunctional, co-constructed by several ELF speakers on the basis of their shared linguistic resources. Given this property, the author argues against relegating idiom variants as 'troublesome minefields to be avoided' (p. 154) and discusses them, instead, as 'cooperative' operations that successfully facilitate ELF communication.

The next two chapters extend the scope of analysis in terms of the creative targets and the number of languages involved. Chapter 6 steers to the field of metaphorical creativity, reiterating the significance of metaphor as common ground shared by ELF users. Different types of metaphorical expressions are analyzed, including those exploiting concrete images (e.g., using *locking the wheels* to denote an obstruction of progress), recurrent patterns (e.g., employing an array of fighting metaphors, such as *put on full armor* and *take out the old swords and lances*, in a professional meeting), and embodied concepts such as hands, feet and heart. It is observed that creative metaphors not only diversify conversations, but also unite ELF speakers across language boundaries. Upon confirming this multi-layered effectiveness, the author appeals for 'a special place' (p. 188) for metaphor in a descriptive framework for ELF.

In line with the view of ELF as a site of 'transient language contact' (Pitzl, 2016), Chapter 7 sets ELF interaction in Europe as a typical example and continues to examine metaphorical creativity from a multilingual viewpoint. Two core concepts, i.e., the individual multilingual repertoire (IMR) and the multilingual resources pool (MRP), are proposed to trace the progress of conversation in ELF settings. The author compares a variety of VOICE examples with metaphorical images either shared between English and other languages (e.g., *don't wake up any dogs* as a variant of English/German saying), or borrowed from other

languages (e.g., *put my hands into the fire for it* as translated from Dutch). Functionally, it is also noted that manifestations of multilingual creativity, with or without obvious intentions, can help strengthen regio-cultural identities and increase intercultural awareness.

Chapter 8 is the conclusion of the book. In addition to the regular summary of findings, implications and future directions of research, the author makes an interesting yet thought-provoking proposal to pedagogy. It is suggested that the 'ELF perspective' should be integrated into English teaching practice, even into language education at large.

This theme-centred work contributes to systemizing research on ELF and related subjects in many ways. Setting 'creativity in ELF' as the main line, the book has primarily fulfilled its purpose of capturing the aspect of variation lurking in situations of language contact. The author develops a series of descriptive concepts (e.g., re-metaphorization in Chapter 2 and IMR/MRP in Chapter 7), which forcefully reconcile the ostensible conflict between creativity and conventionality. Meanwhile, they converge to sketch out different phases of ELF interactions in, but not restricted to, the creative use of idiom and metaphor. Moreover, the natural involvement of non-English expressions gives attention to the cross-linguistic and cultural influences in ELF contexts. With an emphasis on the 'ELF ≠ English-only' spirit (p. 9), this book inspires researchers of English from various language backgrounds. Accordingly, it offers great potential for expanding research territories on multilingual development and intercultural communication.

There are, however, still some controversial issues in the book. First, the standard for evaluating creativity seems loose to a certain extent. The author, as an ELF advocator, tacitly holds an all-inclusive attitude towards the varied forms found in VOICE. For instance, Chapter 4 categorizes non-native-like phrases (e.g., *on long run*, *in the right track*) indiscriminately as 'creative' uses. This somewhat indulgent treatment smacks of overgeneralization to careful readers. Second, the pedagogical application of 'creativity in ELF' is underdeveloped. Although the author approves of integrating 'ELF awareness into language education' (p. 249), how to put this idea into practice remains the hard nut to crack. Against the backdrop of globalization, it is necessary to call for teachers of English as a second or foreign language to negotiate a relationship between Standard English and ELF, since without norms and rules, real creativity will have little regularity to resort to.

That being said, the book definitely deepens our understanding of the interplay between convention and variation in English as a common language worldwide. It is thus recommended to ELF scholars as well as

graduate students for further research, and more extensively, to those interested in multilingualism and intercultural communication as a helpful reference book.

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