Deconstructing the English Language User: The ELF Perspective

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This paper describes how the conceptual underpinnings of the English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) perspective can offer us an avenue to describe the language user/speaker of English in a more apt manner. This is especially true in contexts like Malaysia, where the roles and status of the English language have changed in recent times. Concepts and categories such as 'non-native speaker', 'native speaker', 'L2 learner', 'standard', and 'non-standard' are currently widely used in second language acquisition (SLA) research when explaining the roles and status of English and the second language (L2) language user/speaker. Although these concepts and categories have been able to shed light on the language learning processes, these 'traditional' ways of describing the language user/speaker may not necessarily be helpful and suitable. Some of these concepts cannot fully explicate the complexity of the nature of interactions in contexts where English has had a long history of existence. Relying merely on these 'traditional' concepts and categories to describe the language user/speaker may not reflect the norms of English usage and functions. Thus, this paper aims to adopt an approach based on ELF interactions to generate a different understanding of the English language user/speaker. Although, L2 learners' language proficiency may be limited, ELF research shows that these learners/users of English are able to perform discursively and are adept in getting their messages across. This paper will look at some samples of spoken ELF discourse and re-examine the suitability of some of the 'traditional' concepts in SLA research used to describe the L2 learners/users given the current reality of the English language in Malaysia. This paper will use ELF spoken data to exemplify the intricacies and strategies that are involved in ELF interactions. This paper will also attempt to highlight what is sometimes termed as 'deficient' under the SLA paradigm can in fact be viewed as interaction features under the ELF paradigm.