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# English as a working language in a Transnational Education environment in China: ELF from the angle of situated and cooperative cognition

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Mit den 2000er Jahren hat sich ein rasanter Anstieg in der Hochschulinternationalisierung vollzogen, die gerade in China mit der Akzentsetzung auf Transnationaler Erziehung (TNE) und dem Export englischsprachiger Bildung und Bildungsmodelle einhergeht. English als Unterrichtsmedium (EMI) steht dabei häufig im Mittelpunkt von Untersuchungen. Im TNE-Umfeld spielt das Englische jedoch darüber hinaus als Arbeitssprache in sämtlichen Prozessen des Hochschulbetriebs eine zentrale Bedeutung. Mit der Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU) unterhält China ein TNE Joint Venture mit Doppelabschlüssen, an dem über 50% der Mitarbeiter Nichtmuttersprachler des Englischen aus über 50 verschiedenen Nationen und die Studierenden zu 90% chinesische Muttersprachler sind. Der vorgelegte Artikel stellt eine Studie vor, die untersucht, ob und wie die Hochschule mit Englisch als Lingua franca (ELF) unter diesen Bedingungen funktioniert. Sie konzentriert sich zunächst auf die per beobachtender Teilnahme erhobenen ethnographischen Daten zweier Entscheidungsgremien (academic committees) und nimmt dort den Protokollierprozess unter die Lupe. Die ersten Ergebnisse der ethnographischen Studie verweisen darauf, dass erst die Einbettung des Protokollierens in die weiteren operationalen Prozesse sowie ein Reihe von Stützmassnahmen das Funktionieren mit (oder trotz?) ELF im Sinne kollaborativ situierter Kognition möglich machen.

### Schlüsselwörter:

Englisch als Lingua franca (ELF), Englisch als Unterrichtsmedium (EMI), Internationalisierung der Hochschulbildung, Transnationale Erziehung (TNE), Protokollieren, kollaborativ situierte Kognition.

### Keywords:

English as a lingua franca (ELF), English as a medium of instruction (EMI), internationalization of higher education, Transnational Education (TNE), minute-taking, situated and cooperative cognition.

## 1. Introduction

The 2000's have seen the rise of internationalized education, with Transnational Education (TNE) often a key aspect of internationalization strategies of higher education institutions. Knight (2016) suggests that TNE can be thought of as either the mobility of educational provision through examples such as franchising or double/joint degrees, or the mobility of educational providers across national borders through initiatives such as branch campuses or joint-ventures. Countries, regions and universities may be involved in TNE activities

for a number of reasons. Huang (2007) suggests that TNE is reacting to developments in information technology, today's connected society as well as the growth of economic globalization. Universities may be responding to the demand for an international experience from students (UK HE IU 2016), as well as a desire to increase their (students') attributes and employability (Olcott 2009). Jo Johnson, UK Minister of State for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation, at the 2015 Going Global conference on International Higher Education (HE) observed that 'Global education leads to wealth, health and mutual understanding. It builds foundations for cultural and economic enrichment' (UK HE IU 2016: 9).

TNE is typically associated with the exporting of English speaking education and educational models. Lawton and Katsomitros (2012) estimated that there were more than 220 international campuses globally, with the vast majority established by English speaking countries such as the USA, The United Kingdom, Canada and Australia. This has the effect of making English the common language - or lingua franca - in international higher education (Wilkins & Urbanovic 2014). It logically follows then that English is the language of instruction regardless of the location of delivery. The growth of these English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) courses is therefore an interesting by-product of TNE, with Walkinshaw, Fenton-Smith and Humphreys (2017) describing EMI as the new norm.

It is within this broader area of TNE environments that the present study is situated. In our case, English is not only the medium of instruction, but the working language and lingua franca for all purposes. This paper is part of a wider study that looks at how successful communication is within a TNE Joint Venture English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) setting, by analysing interactions at committee meetings and subsequent decision-making. The present paper looks at two committee interactions, using a participatory-observation methodology. In the following sections, we will first describe the research site by giving a brief overview of the wider TNE context within China before moving on to the specifics within the committee meetings, and then going on to discuss the research methodology and why it was chosen. In a third step, we will discuss two committee interactions in greater detail, focusing on the process surrounding minute-taking. The minute-taking process is described with examples that illustrate that communicative success is a function of the overall process and can best be explained within a framework of situated cognitive activity.

## **2. The wider context - TNE and China**

China has been particularly active in promoting TNE (Huang 2007), and since 1983 a number of government regulations have been passed to make Chinese-foreign initiatives easier. These initiatives started with the passing of the 1983

Chinese Ministry of Education (MoE) Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools("中华人民共和国中外合作办学条例"), which allowed Chinese - foreign joint educational ventures. The latest situation is that since 2003 the government has issued a small number of licenses to foreign providers to establish 'universities' in collaboration with local partners, or joint ventures. To date, nine successful full joint ventures have been set up, with the initial two licenses issued in 2005 to the University of Nottingham Ningbo (UNNC), and United International College (UIC), and the latest license being issued in 2015 to the Guangdong-Technion Israel Institute of Technology.

One further outcome of this, albeit a significant one, has been the National Plan for Medium and Long Term Educational Reform and Development (Ministry of Education 2010), which has set out three strategic goals for the period from 2010 to 2020. These goals are: achieving educational modernisation; forming a learning society; and transforming China into a country with competitive human resources; and these principles from 2010 still guide higher education reform today.

### **3. The Research Site – Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University: A TNE Joint Venture Institution within China**

Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU) is an EMI TNE university located in Suzhou in the Jiangsu Province of China. It was established in 2006, and is accredited by the University of Liverpool for delivery of provision leading to University of Liverpool awards at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. It is simultaneously a Chinese tier 1 university, accredited by the Chinese Ministry of Education to deliver Chinese degrees at undergraduate level. Such bachelor double degree programmes must meet the requirements of both UK and Chinese regulatory systems, and follow UK quality assurance purposes. Over 90% of students are Chinese native speakers, and over 50% of staff are non-native speakers of English. English is not just the medium of instruction but is the lingua franca for all purposes; it is the working language of the university.

The university website highlights the vision 'To become a research-led international university in China and a Chinese university recognised internationally for its unique features in learning and teaching, research, social service, and education management'. Like many similar EMI TNE joint venture universities, XJTLU faces a real challenge in creating 'a truly international university' with English as the medium of instruction and working language without compromising quality within its context.

### **4. The Study**

The impact of the use of English at XJTLU has been the subject of an inter-university research project between XJTLU and the Zurich University of Applied

Sciences (ZHAW), Switzerland. The study makes a number of assumptions, and perhaps the most important as well as controversial one is that the institution is working in an English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) environment. This is controversial as Jenkins (2011) highlights the fact that many TNE institutions have a policy towards English meaning business as usual in looking towards native speaker standards. So English may well be the academic lingua franca, but the environment may not be considered an ELF one. In this case, however, as part of its language policy (see Perrin 2017) and in recognition that English native speakers are only a very small minority of staff and students, XJTLU has made a conscious decision not to enforce the concept of the idealised (English) native speaker (Leung, Harris & Rampton 1997) and the standards that this would suggest. Accordingly, we consider this to be an ELF context in which English is used by native speakers and non-native speakers with different first languages. Whilst for around eighty percent of students Modern Standard Chinese may be the first or native language, for staff the first language could be one of over twenty five plus languages, with over fifty different nationalities working at the university. In view of the multilingual background of students and staff and the English-only working environment, key questions therefore include 'what impact does ELF have on the decision-making within the TNE setting' or, to put it another way, 'does running a TNE institution work with English as the working language in an ELF context'?

The study aimed to look at communicative success in a TNE setting with a focus on analysing committee meetings. These were targeted for their central role in providing a framework for setting university policy within the TNE environment, though they are under-researched within such environments. Kosmutzky and Rahul (2016), in a review of the literature on research into TNE, highlighted that the most common areas of study are quality assurance, educational policies, cultural differences, the student experience, and academic staff attitudes. Within the XJTLU context, managers are usually those who make up the committees, and need to implement the decisions made. They may be academic or professional services, not necessarily English native speakers, but have usually substantial overseas or English speaking experience, which is in contrast to the secretaries who are servicing the meetings. However, as Wilkins (2016) highlights, managers within TNE environments are often ill-prepared, despite the experience that they bring linguistically, suggesting that management faces unique challenges often without appropriate experience or training.

One of the challenges revolves around this use of English among people with different English-speaking backgrounds. Committee meetings are conducted in English and the minutes are finalized in English. The chairs are invariably English native speakers, participants a mixture of native and non-native speakers, and the committee secretaries Chinese first-language speakers. The minutes, which act as summaries of the discussions as well as the final decisions, are usually taken in English by these secretaries, both in the draft



and final forms, but are discussed before finalization with the (native speaker) chairs in two consecutive (post-committee) meetings. The final minutes are thus the result of a cycle of two (and sometimes three) rounds of revisions leading to an expanded final version which reflects discussion with the native speaker, but is not proof-read by a native speaker and therefore usually contains some ELF-specific non-standard features.

Against this background and in order to determine whether running a TNE institution with English as the working language in an ELF environment works or not, the wider study addressed four research questions:

- What is the relationship between language and accuracy in note-taking in a TNE environment?
- What impact do different Englishes and accents have on note-taking in a TNE environment?
- What, if any, accommodation techniques or processes are needed to enable effective note-taking to take place?
- What is the relationship between professional services staff representations of their understanding of English/es in a TNE working environment, and their perceptions of English in intercultural minute-taking?

This paper analyses two committee meetings which took place at the university through the use of participatory observation, looking at the following research question:

- To what extent does the use of English under ELF conditions impact minute taking by Chinese secretaries and thus affect the communicative success of the committee meetings the minutes serve to document within the TNE environment at XJTLU?

## **5. Research Methods**

For the wider study, data was collected using a multi-method qualitative framework based on a longitudinal case study at XJTLU. Data was collected through a combination of audio-recordings of meetings, draft and final versions of minutes, interviews and observations, enabling rich data to be collected and analysed such that it was possible to understand the committee setting as socially constructed. Ethical approval was granted through the XJTLU Research Ethics Sub-Committee for the interviews and observations to take place. This paper concentrates on observations from two committees, the Academic Quality and Standards Sub-Committee (AQSSC) and the Departmental Learning and Teaching Committee (DLTC). These two committees were analysed as they represent samples of the two layers of the committee structure, with one operating at university level while the other operates at departmental level.

Recognising the importance of language in this study, and how it is being used, we draw on the tradition of language socialisation, and collect data using participatory observation approaches. Duff (2010) suggests that a language socialisation perspective sees development as culturally situated and that 'language is learned through interactions with others who are more proficient in the language and its cultural practices and who provide novices explicit and (or) implicit mentoring or evidence about normative, appropriate uses of the language'. While much language socialisation research has been with relatively young language learners, there is also a tradition of research with older groups within education. Duff (2017) highlights that there have been many studies of academic socialisation within universities and schools. Cook (1999) for example looked at Japanese elementary classrooms and highlighted differences based on culture on Japanese and Western pedagogical practices, whilst Vickers (2007) conducted research on second language socialisation in project team meetings at an American university computing and electrical engineering department. Equally important has been research that looks at transitions from education to work-based practices. Bremner (2012) for example highlighted language socialisation practices of a bilingual Cantonese-English woman's in Hong Kong into professional communication at a public relations (PR) company.

In our case, the transitions that the secretaries of the committees within the university, who are typically Chinese first language speakers, go through as they adjust to Western work and language practices follow similar trajectories. The language being learned in the case of this study is the language of the committee as indicated through the acquisition of cultural norms of note-taking. Garrett (2017) indicates that a basic assumption of language socialisation researchers is that the acquisition of language cannot be separated from the acquisition of other kinds of social and cultural knowledge. In other words, as the language of committee note-taking is learned, so is the understanding of how committees function within the university.

Participant observation was chosen as the most appropriate (qualitative) research method to collect the data. This enabled the researcher to observe what occurred in the committee meetings and take notes, which was then complimented with audio recordings to build up a picture of what is going on. Gaining entry into the location of study was relatively easy as the site was the place of work of one of the main researchers, although ethical approval was needed and granted. Data for the full study was collected over two three-week periods by two master students from ZHAW as part of their MA thesis projects (Gantenbein 2016; Latheron 2016), ensuring that enough time was spent with the participants in their environment to collect rich data. The study was holistic in that a variety of data was collected, field-notes from the meetings, audio recordings and both pre-and post-committee meeting interviews, which also enabled the researchers to establish meaning to the actions they observed (Gobo & Marciniak 2016). The study also had elements of both researching up

and researching down (see Eberle & Maeder 2016) in that although senior management of the university and committee chairs were interviewed to establish what their expectations were from committee minutes (researching down), time spent with the actual committee secretary ensured that there was also a degree of researching up.

## **6. Data Analysis and Discussion**

This paper focuses on two committees: the 'Academic Quality and Standards Sub-Committee (AQSSC)' and the 'Departmental Learning and Teaching Committee' (DLTC) of one academic department. The AQSSC meets twice a semester and approves changes to degree programmes and to changes to modules within the programmes. The committee consists of 10 members drawn from across the academic spectrum, and includes two members from professional services. One of these is a Chinese first-language speaker, as is the committee secretary. The chair is an English native speaker, as are two other committee members, whilst the remaining have neither English nor Chinese as their first language. The DLTC is the main decision-making committee within an academic department. In the DLTC observed as part of our study, the committee consists of 11 members representing all the different areas of business of the department. There are two student representatives, one Chinese and one an international student; the chair of the committee is an English native speaker, as are all non-student members except the Chinese and Spanish language representatives, and the committee secretary is a Chinese first-language speaker.

In both committees, the committee secretary follows the same procedure in that she takes notes during the meeting, and also audio records the meeting. The audio recordings are used to add to the notes in producing the committee minutes, which are agreed with the chair before being sent to all members as a record of the meeting, and being used as a basis for informing decisions made. They are also made available online through the intranet for non-committee members.

The minutes need to accurately reflect committee decisions, as well as serve as a summary and reference document, capturing the detail of the meetings. They also need to take into account the twin sets of regulations from the governing regulatory bodies of the University of Liverpool and the Chinese Ministry of Education as a result of its joint venture status. The minutes document the decision-making process and therefore safeguard transparency.

Discussions and interviews with the committee secretaries, as well as senior management were quite revealing in understanding the nature of the minutes produced and the procedures involved. The Director of Professional Services at the university described the minutes as needing to 'provide information on



cause-and-effect to facilitate progress monitoring'. One of the committee chairs indicated that for committees (at XJTLU) to be successful, it [the committee]

'needs first of all to make decisions. It [the committee] certainly needs to be transparent and inclusive. People need to feel that they are part of the committee. And it [the committee] also needs to be understandable'.

Referring to language, the chair goes on to say that 'the language itself needs to be clear and concise, but the action needs to be watertight, not necessarily the language. You need to obviously allow flexibility for our situation that we exist in here'. In other words there is a focus more on function, the outcomes of the minutes, rather than on form, i.e. on how specific and how 'accurate' the language should be.

While the chair may be focusing on function, the committee secretary can only achieve this through the notes and audio recordings of the meeting. When the AQSSC committee secretary was asked about how she felt about taking minutes for the particular meetings we observed she commented as follows:

'Just like the usual standard, I guess. I mean I can't get everything written down in a meeting, I think I've got the key points mentioned by the committee.'

She went on to add that:

'... sometimes the chair and the members may talk about some academic-related topics, which may not be my professional area, so that will be a difficult part for me to understand'.

It is quite clear from this exchange that the secretary sometimes has issues both with her ability to record everything (in memory and on the note pad) and with her comprehension of what is being said. It is unsurprising that she may not be able to record everything, one reason being that she is working in a second language, listening to a range of other second-language English speakers, as well as two native speakers. However, what is interesting in the exchange is that the secretary attributes not being able to get everything down to her lack of technical or professional knowledge, rather than to her English language ability. This is perhaps not surprising, considering the nature of the committee, and its membership. The chair of the committee reinforces the type of knowledge that is required at the beginning of the meeting, stating that:

'The main things that we're often looking at is the aims of the modules, the aims of the programmes, the learning outcomes, and how those learning outcomes are assessed. We can take into account things such as syllabus, but they're normally dealt with at the department level'.

This type of knowledge is usually discipline specific, and unlikely to be in the lexicon of the committee secretary. Learning outcomes and module aims are usually written in a specific manner following UK quality assurance practices, and while committee members may not have the specialist knowledge of individual modules, they will have the knowledge of how the aims and learning outcomes need to be expressed. For the secretary, who does not deal with such concepts on a daily basis, however, this is not the case and it is interesting to see how she uses the idea of her 'professional area'. Duff (2010) discusses how

language is learned through interaction with others, which is reflected by the secretary who later goes on to say that:

'I will try to understand these stuff in my best, but sometimes it just goes away, and when I practice more, sometimes I will get to understand them in the future'.

The position of the secretary can also be analysed through Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of a community of practice (CoP). These are formed by like-minded people in a collective process of learning in a shared environment of effort. Lave and Wenger indicated that a CoP develops when there is a domain, a community, and the practice. CoPs need an identity formed by shared domains of interest, which implies a degree of commitment and a shared competence. Members of CoPs develop shared practices, solutions to problems and experiences. Membership of a committee can be seen as being part of a CoP. This is illustrated by the chair of the committee highlighting the shared importance to the university that the members have by stating that:

'... this is possibly the most important committee from the academic perspective in the University, because this is the committee which determines whether new programmes, programme changes and module changes can actually be approved and go forward'.

He repeats himself later by again indicating that '... we're the guardians of academic quality'. When the secretary is asked about her own role within the committee, she seems to recognize that she is not yet a member of the 'community', though her desire to move from being on the periphery to a member of the centre within the community is evident in her response that:

'Sometimes my colleagues just don't understand what we are doing for the modules and programmes, but since I am taking minutes and serving as a secretary in this sub-committee, I will get to know more'.

It is difficult to ascertain what would help the secretary in making the transition from periphery to centre. The specialist knowledge is known to play a role in ELF communication (Dröschel 2011) and the secretary sees her issue as being lack of professional or specialist rather than linguistic knowledge. What the data reveal, however, is that it is unlikely that the secretary had a full grasp of what was being discussed, because her hand-written notes are minimal and could not possibly have served as a basis for a final version that would fulfil their purpose of committee meeting summary and decision-making support. The secretary knows, of course, that she is also recording the meeting and, in addition, and as confirmed by one chair, the secretaries are aware that the chair will edit the final minutes to meet their own 'standards' before they are sent out, which may impact how the minutes are drafted. However, from a comparison of the various minute versions of the DLTC committee meeting – from the first hand-written version via those resulting from post-meeting discussions with the chair – it became apparent that out of a total of 12 agenda items only 5 had hand-written notes of any sizeable length. No notes were taken in the case of 4 agenda items and for three items all that was noted down was the word 'agreed'. For instance, for the agenda item 'To consider the minutes of the meeting held

on [date]', this one word was jotted down in the original hand-written version which was then expanded, after a cycle of 4 revisions in meetings with the chair, to a final minute version to the length of five sentences.

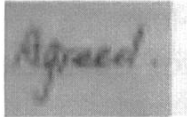
Phase	Minutes version
Agenda item	To consider the minutes of the meeting held on xx <sup>th</sup> Jan 2016
Hand written version from committee meeting	
1 <sup>st</sup> edited version at the beginning of post-meeting no. 1	<i>The committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on xx3<sup>th</sup> Jan 2016 were an accurate record.</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup> edited version at the end of post-meeting no. 1	The committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on xx <sup>th</sup> Jan 2016 were an accurate record. <i>It was mentioned that in relation to point 6a and 7, all actions were complete. With regards to point 8b, it noted that link was now available to UoL and will be a point of discussion at the Joint Liaison Group meeting between UoL and XJTLU on the xx7<sup>th</sup> Mar. For point 8c there was no feedback received. Finally for point 8f it noted that [name] was the new MC.</i>
Final edited version after post-meeting no.2	The committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on xx <sup>th</sup> Jan 2016 were an accurate record. It was mentioned that in relation to point 6a ( <i>CLT ALAs</i> ) and 7 ( <i>follow-up to Unmoderated Portfolio Assessment proposal</i> ), all actions were complete. With regards to point 8b ( <i>EAP information page in ICE</i> ), it noted that link was now available to UoL and will be a point of discussion at the Joint Liaison Group meeting between UoL and XJTLU on the xx <sup>th</sup> Mar. For point 8c ( <i>the LC staff-student communication area on ICE</i> ) there was no feedback received. Finally for point 8f ( <i>changes to BA China Studies</i> ) it was noted that [name] was the new Y3 EAP MC.

Table 1: Revision cycle of minutes from first hand-written to final typed version (parts added in each revision phase in italics)

Note-taking is solipsistic in nature in that its production and reception is by one and the same person, the note-taker, and is meant for exclusive communication only for herself. In view of their function as a memory support, notes are also a highly reduced and incomplete ancillary text and can be understood only in conjunction with the previously memorized mental representation built up in the course of the communicative action during which the notes were taken (Albl-Mikasa 2016: 92). While this functional dimension is illustrated by the above example from the data, the example also shows that notes may be extremely minimalist to the extent that their successful functioning becomes questionable.

This has a bearing on communicative success which is at the core of our investigation. On one hand, minutes are an integral part of communicative success of the meetings as they act as summaries of what was discussed and decided upon and have to be comprehensible and understood by committee members as reminder and by outsiders to the committee as a source of information. As such communicative success in committee meetings depends on the degree to which the committee secretary, an ELF speaker, captures the communication that takes place within the meeting. On the other hand, it is almost impossible to determine the extent to which the non-native secretary could and did follow the English discussion and what comprehension problems she encountered. This is further complicated by the subjective dimension of communicative success. Kohn (2018: 11) highlights that successful ELF communication is difficult to define and that 'speaker or listener satisfaction' are an important endonormative criterion of communicative success. He suggests that with authentic communication, if the speaker and listener perceive success in terms of their performance matching their own subjective requirements or standards, then communication can be deemed successful. This is reflected in the data not only by the secretary's feeling that language is not a major issue, but also by the optimistic view of the chair of multiple committees. When asked whether the use of ELF at XJTLU committee meetings had an impact on the workflow or efficiency, he answered:

'[...] no, I don't think it has an impact at all. I think we're used to working with English or Englishes [...]', an opinion seconded by the Committee Coordinator.

What is clear is that XJTLU functions regardless of whether the committee minutes meet all the expectations and that the minutes work and do what they need to do. This, however, seems to be achieved through a system of backup measures, i.e. audio recording of meetings, multiple rounds of (native speaker) chair interventions which compensate for what initial notes or versions of minutes do not contain and what cannot be reproduced from the notes themselves (had the secretary fully understood everything discussed during the meeting).

This adds a new dimension to the cooperative nature of ELF communication, which is highlighted by researchers such as Kaur (2010), Seidlhofer (2011) and Mauranen (2012), but which has so far been applied to immediate utterance exchange within one single encounter, as evidenced from the dialogic corpus data such as VOICE (see Seidlhofer 2011), ELFA (Mauranen 2006) and ACE (Kirkpatrick 2010) on which studies about cooperative ELF are based. What our study finds is that possible language problems may be offset by collaborative, co-constructive and supportive behavior that extends well beyond the immediate dialogic interaction, across and into the wider operational process. The web of embedding support action is best explained as an instance of situated cognition (Risku 2010), as measures become successful in the TNE

environment that they operate in through the interplay of various stakeholders and influencing factors.

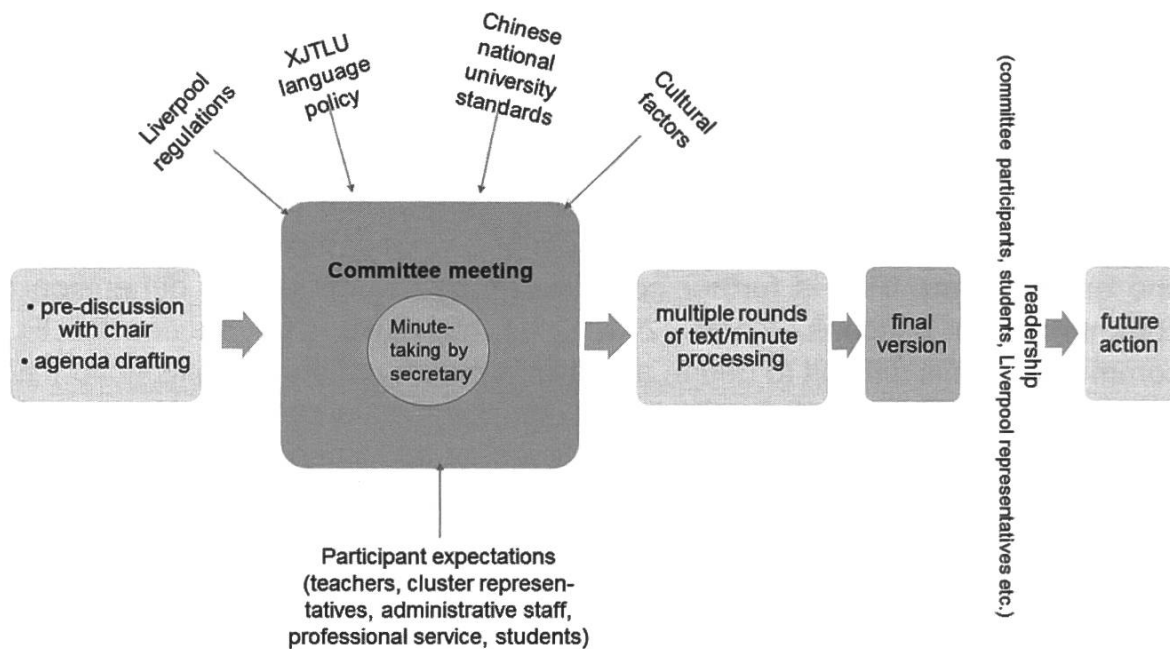


Figure 1: Minute-taking in a TNE environment as situated cognitive activity

Another point that came to the fore is closely linked to the situated cognition framework. Minutes are not 'standalone' but linked to other university documentation especially policies and procedures, and status of action documentation. Moreover, the readership comprises both, English first and second or foreign language speakers, people from numerous academic cultures and norms, early to late career academics and professional services administrators, attendees of the committee meetings and non-attendees. For some the process is familiar, for others it is not. Minutes should be written in such a way as to maximise the chances of each reader being able to create a coherent mental model of their content or what they are about, regardless of first language and educational culture backgrounds or experience of the actual meeting discussions. Ideally this would be an adequate representation of what was decided in the meeting. For some committee members the minutes are only a reminder triggering the mental model or memory of what they have heard during the committee meeting, while for others they are the sole carrier of information. This means that the ELF non-conformities left in the minutes after revision rounds with the native-speaker chair (see above) should have varying effects on different readers. Although it is theoretically possible in subsequent committee meetings, often it may be too late to influence output. It is therefore essential that the minutes are self-explanatory, adding further to the ELF discourse, especially in view of the fact that they are written, which reduces



considerably the potential for interactional meaning negotiation. Again, this means that language variety and accuracy should not be looked at per se, but that the functions and expectations minutes have to fulfill and meet as well as the scope of their influence would need to be taken into consideration when investigating further communicative success under ELF conditions and quality assurance in TNE environments.

## 7. Conclusion

The study presented here is situated in the context of a TNE joint venture which has English not only as a medium of instruction in the classroom, but as a working language for the running of the institution. It is perhaps more obvious to put the research focus on EMI. Here it is put on ELF, addressing, perhaps for the first time, the decision-making processes under ELF conditions in committee meetings in an internationalised university environment. The study zooms in on data gathered by means of participatory observation as part of a richer corpus collected in a broader study conducted by XJTLU and ZHAW. The focus is on the minute-taking process in committee meetings, a key component of decision-making and quality assurance as minutes serve not only a documentary function but also as a basis for future action.

Access to the site, the context, the participants and cues etc. as provided by XJTLU made it possible to take an ethnographic approach affording an emic perspective. Transferring the naturalistic data gathered into a corpus (of transcripts of recordings, interviews, field notes etc.) will make the investigated reality mediated by a dataset. While this will have advantages for follow-up studies in terms of a larger-scale analysis of multiple data, it will only give access to a product, rather than the iterative processes involved (Angelelli 2017). This paper, therefore, first starts by providing insights into the insider perspective gained through participatory observation of minute-taking in committee meetings.

Looking at the different minute versions – from the hand-written original via a cycle of revisions through post-committee-meetings with the chair to the final version – as well as the comments made by the minute-takers or secretaries and by the chair in retrospective interviews, it has become clear that, at this stage, it is not possible to assess the degree to which the use of English under ELF conditions may adversely impact committee communication in general and its manifestation or presentation in the minutes in particular. What can be shown, however, is that it is the embeddedness of minute-taking in the wider operational processes, support actions and intervention of various players that makes it work in the ELF environment. Language problems may thus be offset by collaborative, co-constructive and supportive behavior extending well beyond the immediate dialogic interaction that it is usually attributed to by ELF researchers.

Further analysis of the larger corpus of data will aim at unraveling this highly complex and cooperative process of producing minutes of a committee meeting from the first notes taken by the secretary, a non-native speaker of English, to its final consolidation through interaction with the committee chair, a native speaker of English. In order to identify the influencing factors, the study will be based on (a) a linguistic and content analysis of the (interim-) products involved (e.g. the different minute versions and their ELF-specific non-conformities), (b) an analysis of the key agents' linguistic/professional expertise, and (c) introspective comments by the key agents (e.g. interviews with secretaries concerning problems encountered and how they were addressed). This will allow us to seek more evidence of whether running this TNE institution works with ELF as a working language, or despite ELF.

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