

# Entrevista con... / An Interview with...

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## From Contrastive Rhetoric to English as a Lingua Franca

Professor Anna Mauranen came to Stockholm University in January 2012 to give a plenary talk on science blogging at the 5th Swedish LSP symposium organized by the Centre for Academic English. She is currently Professor of English at the University of Helsinki. Professor Mauranen's recent research and publications focus on English as a lingua franca, corpus linguistics, modelling spoken language, and academic discourses. She is running corpus-based research projects on spoken and written academic English as a lingua franca (the ELFA project, the SELF project, and the WrELFA project) and a project on Global English. Her latest book *Exploring ELF: Academic English Shaped by Non-native Speakers* (2012) has just been published by Cambridge University Press. Her other major publications include *English as a Lingua Franca – Studies and Findings* (with Ranta, 2009); *Linear Unit Grammar* (with Sinclair 2006), *Translation Universals – Do They Exist* (with Kujamäki, 2004), and *Cultural Differences in Academic Rhetoric* (1993). She is a member of the editorial boards of several LSP and applied linguistics journals and co-editor of *JELF, the Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*. During her stay in Stockholm, Professor Mauranen kindly agreed to give an interview to *Ibérica*. On a wintery morning, we sat in the lobby of the Elite Plaza hotel in central Stockholm, enjoying the view of the Royal Library in the snow.

**Maria Kuteeva (MK):** *To begin with, could you please give us a brief overview of your academic trajectory and your previous research?*

**Anna Mauranen (AM):** Well, I started with contrastive rhetoric. That was all a series of coincidences, because I was interested in academic writing and academic text, and I wanted to do research on the differences between different academic disciplines or disciplinary areas or domains. But nobody was really

happy to give me funding for that, so what I did get funding for – with a colleague who is interested in contrastive rhetoric – was contrastive rhetoric, the difference between writing cultures. I thought it was a boring topic, but since I got the funding I started working on that. And that led me to translation studies. I got my first Chair in Translation Studies precisely because I had done work in contrastive rhetoric, although I wasn't attracted to it at all.

*MK: Where was that chair?*

**AM:** That was at the University of Joensuu, now called the University of Eastern Finland. And I thought this was not really where I wanted to work, but it was a really nice professor who said she would really like to have me as her successor because she had got another chair. She used to be professor of English and then she got a Chair in Translation Theory or something like that. So I spent a few years in Translation Studies and since I wasn't a translator, I took corpus linguistics there and started building a translational corpus because I thought I wanted to do something for them.

*MK: Was it a bilingual corpus?*

**AM:** It was a monolingual corpus. My very first corpus project was with Stieg Johansson. It was a contrastive corpus study of Finnish and English, and Stieg's idea was that we would have a Nordic project where the same English would be translated into different Nordic languages. And then, of course, the reverse side was that different Nordic languages could not be the same texts, obviously. But we had this sort of parallel corpus going on, and that was the first project I was ever in. So I thought I had got like a corpus of translational Finnish, of comparable original Finnish, so that was the corpus I collected when I was at Joensuu – there is a bridge, obviously, from contrastive rhetoric to translation studies, because translation is interested in contrasting two languages, and this was perhaps thought of as more trendy and a new approach, compared to just looking at individual structures, sentence-internal things in texts.

This was very much up and coming, so therefore I think I got that chair, but the translational language was a new thing. Nobody looked at that, and I don't know where I got it from, possibly from Mona Baker, who had started planning a translational corpus. So I thought that could be something for me, so that's all I did. That is like a hybrid language, it's to do with language contact, because translation in a way is a language contact, and I had always been interested in second languages and second language acquisition and use, and I thought that was the closest I could get to that in translation

studies. Because if I was not a translation scholar, at least I understand something about what I am saying, so I could combine corpus linguistics and the hybrid language.

But I had also earlier done some work on second languages. My first published research was in language testing, and I had very much criticized the idea of the highest level or the target being defined by pointing and not by defining. It was just pointing – this is native-like so that is like that – so you don't define it any longer. You tended to define it at lower levels and then when it comes to the top, you stop defining, and I thought it was quite illogical. In a way, it also related to ELF because you kind of thought – okay, if you speak a foreign language you need to know what a realistic top level of achievement is. Because you don't become a native speaker again. So I thought that translation studies fed into the same sort of thing of looking at hybridized language, and then language testing was related to trying to define what it was about high level of proficiency in a foreign language that must be somehow different from the native language. Because it is different from a native language.

That was perhaps what led me to ELF, and why ELF in particular, it was just a stroke of luck. I was working at Tampere, and I was walking behind a couple of people who were walking in my way most annoyingly when I was coming from the station to the university because I commuted to Tampere, since it is very close to Helsinki. And these people were talking so intensely that they didn't see I was behind them and was in a hurry. I was really annoyed but I couldn't get past them because the traffic was very heavy, and then I started listening to what they were saying, and I thought – oh, yeah – I didn't really understand what they were talking about but they were speaking English, and they must have been academic but neither of them was a native speaker of English, and I thought – yeah, right, they may be annoying because they are blocking my way but isn't this interesting that probably most English in the world is spoken in contexts like this? And then I thought – yeah, right – and wasn't in such a hurry any more. I started thinking, and that was it...

***MK:** What a nice inspirational moment – that's how great ideas usually come up! That's a real talent to find interesting things at annoying moments. Now let's move on to the ELFA project, the largest existing project on English as a lingua franca in academic settings. Could you tell us about the different stages of this project, where it comes from, and where it is heading?*

**AM:** I was at Tampere at the time and, as I already told you, and I got interested in *lingua franca*. I wasn't aware of the term at the time, but this was it, I think, probably 2000 or something like that, very early 2000 or 1999. Since I was already in corpus linguistics at Tampere and I had always worked a lot with academic English, I thought that this would be a natural thing to do, because I was wondering what my next corpus would be. My translational corpus was finished, and so was the contrastive corpus, so I had to have another corpus and I thought it would be fun to do it on spoken language, because I thought this would be something new and I could get into this interesting thing of people speaking to each other all in a foreign language, and then the natural context was the academy because you had these programmes going on, and it was a limited, confined context.

I had all sorts of other plans, wider plans, like where you would get people talking in English, like NGOs and businesses, but then it turned out very quickly that businesses wouldn't let you record them, they would not rely on you and things like that, so I thought why not continue with academia. There were quite a few programmes there. So I went on from there, but after the first recordings for some years, we didn't get much funding really. Sometimes there was none at all, and I had all sorts of research assistants to do transcribing, then I moved to Helsinki, and the corpus wasn't quite finished, but some of the PhD students stayed behind at Tampere, and we continued it at Helsinki, so Helsinki had more subjects, more fields as well, so they had sciences. The only natural science, if you can call it a natural science, at Tampere was medical science, and then there was a neighbouring university of technology where we did some recordings. So we did some recordings at Helsinki University of Technology and the Sciences at Helsinki, to complete it. So that was how it started, and at first I thought that half a million words would do but then since we reached that target quite quickly, I thought why not one million words.

When the corpus was finished, I thought of a more ethnographic approach, and I wanted to talk to the people and see how they felt about it, and so I set up another project and got funding for that. That was the SELF project, "Studying in English as a *Lingua Franca*", where we also had interviews, and my research students were following the students around, participant observation, talking, hanging around in study events, and Niina Hynninen who is speaking tomorrow, is one of them, and we had all sorts of data there to round up the corpus approach, which is quite detached from the speakers really. I thought that having these two kinds of approaches would help us

understand the context a lot better, to see what is going on, how the people feel about it, what their perspective is, but also to retain the quantitative perspective, to see what gets repeated, what you get a lot of, and what is unusual. And so I don't think I am going to expand the ELFA corpus as it is because I think that one million words of spoken language is quite nice. So for the moment I think it's enough whereas now I thought nobody at all has worked with or has a database of written English as a lingua franca, and that's something that has come up recently in questions.

At first people were really taken aback by the whole idea of ELF, and every time I spoke about it at a conference, people were rather surprised and negative about it saying it is a horrible language, and why do you want to do any research on it because it's bad language, and who wants to study bad language? Everybody wants to study good language, so what on earth are you on about? The same arguments that I had already heard in translation studies – why look at translational language? It's dreadful. Of course, it isn't dreadful, and I said – yeah, yeah, yeah, it's one of those things. But recently people have accepted this, and the change stuck and I've had several times the question addressed to me: It's all right in speech, but what about writing? It wouldn't pass in writing, you can't write things like that. Maybe, you can say things like that and it's all right, but you can't write it.

*MK: And what is included in the WrELFA corpus?*

**AM:** It's difficult to find people's writing that is serious writing and that is public writing, and it's not checked by a native speaker. So I've come up with two things. One is the easily available – blogs, because you've got science blogging going on, and I thought this is interesting because it's new, because it's there, and because it's not checked by a native speaker, but still it's public writing, it's not like their private emails or anything like that, and emails are not that academic either. I meant it's different from academic writing. In some sense, it is publishing if you write in a blog, it's public writing. And the other thing is public writing that is very high-stakes writing, and that is evaluation statements that people produce for thesis examinations and things like that.

*MK: Evaluation reports by examiners?*

**AM:** Yes, we have written examiners' reports in Finland. They tend to write, maybe, three pages, sometimes longer sometimes shorter, but on average most people write about three to five pages. So these are high-stakes texts because they are evaluating somebody else's work, and they also give an

assessment in terms of whether it is acceptable or not. But they are not checked because they are personal texts by somebody, and because it is for a Finnish university and because they write in a foreign language. We don't collect native speakers' reports. That's the other thing that goes into WrELFA, that is still academic.

**MK:** *What about student writing? Do you have any exam papers?*

**AM:** We had those in the SELF project earlier on. It's not really a corpus at all. We just had those texts, and somebody has been analyzing them but they are not being included in the corpus. And I think they might become another corpus, a student writing corpus; that would be rather interesting too. We started with exam papers and term papers, we have got both.

**MK:** *So the WrELFA project is focusing primarily on professional academics?*

**AM:** Yes, because I thought it was closer to academic publishing, which I think is important and interesting and because I think it's changing too. It's less and less native speaker-driven than it used to be. And I think it's an important development and I want to see how it goes. And that's why I want to see what top level professional academic writing is rather than look at students to begin with. Students can be faulty on many different grounds because they are novices in writing anyway. They are novices in their field, they are novices in writing academically, etc, etc, so it's a different kettle of fish. I'd like to look at professionals proper, sort of well-qualified academics.

**MK:** *What about your forthcoming book on academic English by Cambridge University Press? Is it primarily influenced by your insights from the ELFA project, with more theoretical implications?*

**AM:** Yes, I've just got the proofs. So it's more like both my own research in the ELFA project over the years and a survey of theoretical implications of it. I am trying to integrate three perspectives, one is macro-social, what happens in wider language contexts; the other is the cognitive level – how you actually process online, so what is going on in this micro-level of speech; and the third is the interface between the two, which is interaction, because the ELFA corpus is very much biased towards the dialogue, so two thirds of it is dialogic. Because I thought it is in interaction that you actually have to accommodate to the other speaker, in interaction that your language becomes observable and accessible, and therefore the interactional aspect is very important in the book and in analyzing ELFA. I am using two methods in the analysis, which are corpus linguistics and discourse analysis, and

basically trying to lay the ground and see the big picture of what is going on in academic lingua franca, and how to reflect on English as a lingua franca on the whole, because it is a very demanding context for using English. It's common, it's important in the world, and it's also demanding. It's not like a casual tourist encounter. It's a lot more demanding language, which is why I think that linguistically it's also interesting, just like business negotiations are because there is a lot at stake, and it's happening verbally. You can't just communicate by waving your arms.

***MK:** You have recently become interested in the new trends in academic publishing and blogging and in new channels of publication. You've already mentioned some of this in relation to the WrELFA project, and today you are giving a talk on science blogging. So what developments do you see in this area in relation to ELF and LSP research?*

**AM:** I see the relationship to ELF in that you see the internet as a completely international and open forum, and a lot of international and academic communication takes place in English, because that reaches the largest audiences. And although the native speakers of English, especially the Americans, write an awful lot on the internet, that's not all there is. There are lots of non-native speakers and you can even tell that from their language, not from just their names, because they often remain anonymous. And it's very interesting from the ELF perspective because it's free interaction between people with all sorts of language backgrounds, in English, quite independently of whether it's somebody's first language or whichever variety of English they might come from, or whether it's a completely foreign language to them. So it's interesting for ELF, and it's interesting for academic research or LSP because we get more and more research blogging or science blogging, especially in the hard sciences. They write quite a lot and discuss things quite a lot on the internet. And there are interesting developments in getting their results out, like pre-published results. The first publication often, and this is very contested by the way, comes out on a blog or a web thread.

***MK:** In what fields? In physics, maybe, because in medical sciences it would be considered like throwing away all your research before you get into an official publication.*

**AM:** Well, apparently there is a debate, even in physics, and there are all sorts of tensions there, and it's debated very much: Should you? Could you? Is it proper science? But you see these things happening, you see people publishing their findings on the net before they have been published anywhere else. And I think it is very interesting because if you do more and

more of it, then it is something you need to understand if you want to understand the whole field of LSP and academic publishing. At the same time, academic publishers, big publishers, increasingly have all sorts of discussion and facebook sites and blogs, and discussion sites, and they also publish video-clips and add-ons to their papers to make them more attractive and interactive too. So these spontaneous commentaries that you are getting on blogs, they apparently include comments on traditional publications that people have read.

***MK:** Thank you. *Ibérica* is published by AELFE, the European Association of Languages for Specific Purposes. Could you comment on the specificity of ELF in European academic contexts and point out any implications for LSP professionals working and researching in Europe?*

**AM:** Yes, Europe is an interesting region for LSP in that we have so many languages already in Europe, where you have a long tradition of academic publishing. So people in Europe are not necessarily very happy about English being a lingua franca. Yet, Europeans can't just write for other Europeans, so there are these tensions, these pressures to publish in English as well, because they want to reach the globe and not just Europe. And for global research, you have some languages you can still publish in, but for most academics and actually very many fields, you only use English. Especially in the humanities you can use Spanish, Portuguese, French, German, if you want to, but in the hard sciences you don't do that very much or you do it much less. And this hard science approach seems to dominate linguistic realities in LSP. And if you are an LSP professional, you need to help scientists in their work rather than moralise them about the language of their publications.

***MK:** What about the humanities scholars? There is more pressure on them to publish in English as well. So how do you think LSP professionals in Europe should adapt to that?*

**AM:** I think LSP professionals, even in the humanities, are people who do research on LSP and follow its developments and help others publish in the languages they want to publish in rather than tell them what language to publish in. I don't think LSP professionals have any say in what language they ought to publish in, but they can speak about it, they can opine about it, or lobby if they want to. But if you want to be a real professional and help others, you do it in the language they want to publish in.

***MK:** And how do you see ELF in the humanities? ELF is more of a science and engineering phenomenon, isn't it?*



**AM:** It is, yes, but I can see that it is coming into the humanities as well because people do want to publish. There are pressures to publish, but of course nobody has to publish in English. I mean, even if you have pressures, you don't have to succumb to them. I think it has become very much a moral issue – people think it is a kind of moral act to publish in your mother tongue or in a smaller European language, whereas it is cynical and utilitarian to publish in English. And I don't quite understand this discourse but, then again, I might not understand it because I come from English linguistics originally, and we always publish in English. Well, not always, I have also published a lot of papers in Finnish explaining things about language and language learning and translation and what have you, and part of my translation corpus is in Finnish. So that's not the only possibility that academics have, but ELF is something that we have to live with in the humanities as well, because it seems that most people respond to these pressures by publishing internationally. English is the most wide-reaching international language. It's not the only one, obviously, so multilingual publishing is probably going to stay in the humanities for longer than it did in many other fields. On the other hand, if I look around my own faculty, I can see that people are publishing quite happily more and more in English, because they want to make higher claims, because they want to make a mark in the world. People nowadays often feel that they have something important to say, and if they do it in English, it will make a louder noise in the world.

***MK:** Do you think that the humanities scholars have additional challenges in using English as an academic language? And how can this be addressed in LSP teaching, for example?*

**AM:** They do have higher challenges because of the nature of the humanities, because it is so verbal, and they tend to appreciate “good language”, that's closer to their heart than it is in sciences. The natural sciences don't mind it so much although they worry about it as well, but people in the humanities very often don't want to make mistakes, they don't want to sound silly, and they don't want to sound inelegant either. So, good language, elegant language and style are more to them than to people in sciences. I have taught a lot of scientists, and their common worry seems to be: how can they get more variation into their texts because it tends to be so boring? They are always saying that, whereas in the humanities they say: how could I write with fewer mistakes because I want to write elegant English? They worry more about their correctness because they see themselves as good writers in the first place, whereas scientists

rarely do. That repetitiveness problem – I’ve never had that from a humanities person.

***MK:** Now this brings us to the last question about the status of English as an academic lingua franca, which has become the subject of heated debates in Europe, particularly in the north. One of the latest issues of *Ibérica* has explored some aspects of this topic. How do you see the role of local academic languages in relation to ELF, in teaching, learning, and daily use. We have spoken a lot about academic publishing now, but what about ELF and local languages in higher education?*

**AM:** I think that in higher education, more than in publishing, multilingualism and plurilingualism is going to be the rule. People use different languages, they use different language resources, and they use their local languages and other languages that they share more than English. There is no need to stick to one language only, and I think there is going to be a lot of hybridization, a lot more language contact, and a lot more code-switching and simply using many languages at the same time and in the same contexts. I don’t think that in spoken language, in spoken interaction, it is going to be as monolithic as people would like to make out. Because this is not what I hear around me. This is my impression but I also think realistically, in terms of how people use languages, and they are not as purist about using just one language in actual communication. They use whatever works, and they change the languages according to who they are talking to and as the situation changes, and things like that. So I think in academic spoken language and a lot more variation is going to stay alive.

***MK:** Right, excellent! Thank you very much!*

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