

Making the EFL to ELF transition in English-Medium Instruction at a Global Traction University

**This is an author generated pdf of a chapter accepted for publication in the book *English-Medium Instruction in Japanese Higher Education: Policy, Challenges, and Outcomes*. For the definitive publisher version, please refer to [Multilingual Matters](#).**

## **Making the EFL to ELF transition in English-Medium Instruction at a Global Traction University**

Jim McKinley

This chapter provides an analysis of the situation of English-medium instruction (EMI) at Sophia University, one of Japan's selected universities for both the Global 30 and the Top Global University projects. The Global 30 Project was launched by Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) in 2009 and concluded in 2014. It was part of an attempt to increase the number of foreign students in Japanese universities to 300,000 by 2020. The Top Global University Project was then launched, refocusing energies on enhancing internationalization. The G30 Project was consistently criticized from its inception (see for example, Burgess *et al.*, 2010; Hashimoto, 2013). Probably the most egregious issue was the discrepancy between the objectives of the project focusing too much on its goal to increase international student numbers and ignoring its other goal to increase domestic students' English skills. This chapter attempts to offer a more positive evaluation of the project by exploring the changes in direction made at Sophia during its participation in the G30 Project, and the direction it has moved in at the launch of the Top Global University Project.

### **Introduction**

This chapter highlights three programs at Sophia that feature English as the medium of instruction, either partially or entirely. It discusses a study which explores the relevance of EMI in providing what the university describes as *global studies* – a term with no shared understanding, that stakeholders interpret differently. Two analytical frameworks: English as a Foreign Language vs English as a Lingua Franca (Jenkins, 2006), and English Language Teaching vs Global Englishes Language Teaching (Galloway & Rose, 2015) were used to provide perspective on the ways that instructors in these programs approached English as a medium of study as opposed to viewing English as an object of study. This is a reflection of Sophia's long history of successfully teaching through English both before and after the MEXT project initiatives. Findings indicate that Sophia's balance of language and support might be the key to success in EMI. Furthermore, in consideration of Sophia's accomplishments in generally meeting its Global 30 Project objectives, the Sophia programs could potentially provide examples of successful EMI education in Japan.

# Making the EFL to ELF transition in English-Medium Instruction at a Global Traction University

## Setting of the Study

Sophia University is a small, private and prestigious institution in central Tokyo. It is well known in Japan as an international university that now has more than a thousand foreign students, out of a total student body of nearly 12,000. Founded by the Society of Jesus in 1913, the university has always offered a strong internationally orientated education, and since 1949 at least one English-taught program (ETP) (Gardner, 2010). In total, Sophia maintains eight undergraduate faculties with 28 departments and 10 graduate schools with 25 programs. EMI for undergraduates, known internally as *English-conducted classes*, is offered in several departments and programs. All the courses in the Faculty of Liberal Arts are taught in English. The Science and Technology Faculty began EMI courses in 2012. Some EMI courses are also offered as part of the undergraduate programs in the Department of English Studies, the Department of English Literature, the Department of Economics and the Department of Management, as well as some university-wide required general education courses (e.g. Christian Humanism, Physical Education). At the graduate level, Sophia offers the following ETPs: an MA in Global Studies/Japanese Studies/International Business and Development Studies; a PhD in Global Studies/Japanese Studies; MS and PhD in Green Science and Engineering; MA and PhD in Global Environmental Studies; and an MA in Linguistics (TESOL: Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages).

Sophia University's G30 Project plan had various objectives that were focused very much on EMI as a route to increasing international student numbers, which was an outcome at the core of the G30 initiative (Rose & McKinley, 2017). The outline of Sophia's objectives provided on the MEXT official website for the G30 Project is as follows:

To establish its international network and to expand study abroad opportunities for both Japanese and international students (Target Number by 2020: outgoing from 400 to 1000, and incoming international students from 1000 to 2600). The university plans to have New English programs (Global Environmental Studies in graduate program, Green Materials and Green Engineering Programs in Faculty of Science and Technology for undergraduate level), short-term study programs, and scholarships to meet the students' needs. (MEXT, 2014a)

The objectives that were accomplished during the project funding cycle included:

- (1) establishing degree English programs;
- (2) improving the quality of education, especially courses taught in English;
- (3) expanding the network of overseas partners;
- (4) increasing the number of international students ;
- (5) improving the environment for international students;
- (6)

## Making the EFL to ELF transition in English-Medium Instruction at a Global Traction University

creating a network of global universities within and outside Japan; (7) building a language center for education and research; (8) establishing overseas offices for recruitment and network building.

In consideration of Sophia University's ability to generally meet its G30 objectives, and its success with EMI, it was selected in 2014 as a *global traction university* as part of the Top Global University Project, intended to lead the internationalization of higher education in Japan (MEXT, 2014b). Sophia's participation in the project involves the creation of 'a global campus with multilateral hub functions' (MEXT, 2014b, para. 2). The specific goals (original numbers based on fiscal year 2013 statistics) are:

- (1) add 30 more foreign instructors by fiscal year 2023;
- (2) increase the ratio of overseas-educated instructors to 57% from 47.5%;
- (3) increase the number of students coming from abroad to 2940 from 1358;
- (4) increase the number of Sophia students going abroad (based on inter-college agreements) to 1600 (just over 15% of undergraduates) from 519 (less than 5% of undergraduates); and
- (5) raise the ratio of English-conducted classes to 22.8% from 13.6%.

In an effort to achieve these goals, Sophia will be offering pre-enrolment language programs (i.e. English for academic purposes programs for international and domestic students), expanding scholarship offerings, increasing the number of autumn-semester-start programs (including six departments and three graduate schools by 2023) and, in line with other Top Global universities such as Waseda and Keio, gradually shifting to a quarter system (MEXT, 2014b).

### **Analytical Frameworks: EFL vs ELF and ELT vs GELT**

Supporting both the G30 and Top Global projects is a change in attitude that understands students as users of English rather than learners of English. The idea is connected to respecting students as owners of English with their own agency rather than imperfect copies of a native speaker model. This long overdue change in attitude in Japan has been spurred by EMI, but has not yet been fully realized. The reality for Japanese higher education is that this shift in mindset is necessary before EMI can really take off. Two similar perspectives, both relevant to EMI in Japan, may provide the impetus to a fuller realization of students as respected English users. The first perspective focuses on the shift in classroom theory and practice from English as a foreign language (EFL) to English as a lingua franca (ELF). Jenkins (2006) suggests five different criteria through which we can

## Making the EFL to ELF transition in English-Medium Instruction at a Global Traction University

understand this shift, outlined in Table 15.1.

**Table 15.1** English as a foreign language (EFL) vs English as a lingua franca (ELF)

|  | EFL   | ELF                        |
|--|---|----------------------------|
| View of English                        | Part of modern foreign languages                  | Part of World Englishes    |
| Contrast with NE                       | Deficit perspective                               | Difference perspective     |
| View of metaphors                      | Transfer/interference and fossilization metaphors | Contact/evolution metaphor |
| Process of language use                | Conformative, monolingual bias                    | Transformative, bilingual  |
| View of code-switching and code mixing | Interference error                                | Bilingual resource         |

*Note:* Adapted from Jenkins (2006).

The other, more detailed perspective, focuses on the shift in classroom theory and practices from English Language Teaching (ELT) to Global Englishes Language Teaching (GELT). The narrow focus of traditional ELT lacks relevance in the Japanese higher education context. In response came the very recently developed model of GELT, which offers a framework in which students are recognized as their own agents of English language use in a global context, and are not tested against native-speaker norms. Galloway and Rose (2015) suggest nine criteria through which we can understand the shift (see Table 15.2).

**Table 15.2** English Language Teaching (ELT) vs Global Englishes Language Teaching (GELT)

|                     | Traditional ELT | GELT            |
|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Target interlocutor | NESs            | NESs and NNESSs |
| Owners              | NESs            | NESs and NNESSs |

## Making the EFL to ELF transition in English-Medium Instruction at a Global Traction University

---

|                |  |   |
|----------------|--|---|
| Target culture | Fixed NE culture                               | Learners' C1, interlocutors' C1 and fluid 'cultures'    |
| Norms          | NE and concept of Standard English             | Diversity, flexibility and multiple forms of competence |
| Teachers       | NNESTs (same L1) and NESTs                     | NNESTs (same L1 and different L1), NESTs                |
| Role-model     | NESs   | Successful ELF users                                    |
| Materials      | NE and NESs                                    | NE, NNE, ELF and ELF communities and contexts           |
| L1 and C1      | Seen as a hindrance and source of interference | Seen as a resource                                      |
| Paradigm       | Informed by the language teaching paradigm     | Informed by the Global Englishes paradigm               |

---

*Note:* Adapted from Galloway and Rose (2015). N/NES/T = non/native English speaker/teacher. C1 = first culture.

### The Study

Data for this study were collected through interviews with instructors, analysis of program descriptions, and classroom observations. Data were analyzed to evaluate criticisms of the G30 project (e.g. Burgess *et al.*, 2010; Hashimoto, 2013), including a lack of integration of local and international students in the program. Data were also analyzed according to the EFL vs ELF and ELT vs GELT frameworks, which were used to look at the degree that the instructors in these programs had transitioned from using English as a language of study to using English as a medium of study. Each program was evaluated using a combined ELF and GELT framework, in consideration of the criteria relevant to the context of EMI in Japan. The seven criteria in the combined framework are:

(1) difference perspective; (2) away from monolingual bias; (3) code-switching and mixing a resource; (4) target interlocutors and cultures NNESTs; (5) teacher variance (NNESTs and NESTs); (6) role models (successful ELF users); (7) C1 and L1 seen as resource.

### Purpose of the study

## Making the EFL to ELF transition in English-Medium Instruction at a Global Traction University

Sophia University offered a variety of EMI courses as well as one full ETP before its participation in the G30 and Top Global University projects. With its reputation as an established international education institution, there was little doubt among administrators that Sophia would be selected for these funding schemes. During its preparation years for the selection, there was some growing concern that students would be enrolling in courses in English and unable to keep up owing to a lack of language proficiency. Nevertheless, in the final years of the G30 Project, it was recognized that, in consideration of Sophia's efforts in further developing their English-medium offerings, it did generally meet project objectives (i.e. Sophia increased the number of EMI programs and was on track to reach the expected number, set by MEXT, of 2600 international students by 2020). However, it was not clear as to whether or not students enrolled in English-taught courses were receiving improved quality of education, as outlined in Sophia's G30 objectives.

### Participants

Three instructors were involved in the study, each belonging to different undergraduate programs that offer courses taught in English, including the Faculty of Liberal Arts, the Green Science program (within the Faculty of Science and Technology) and the Department of English Studies (within the Faculty of Foreign Studies). The Green Science and Liberal Arts programs have a high ratio of foreign students and are the university's two purely ETPs where an entire four-year degree can be earned through English. In the English Studies program, which focuses on literature and culture in the Anglosphere rather than English language, nearly all students are Japanese and, while some courses follow an EMI model, others are taught in Japanese (see Table 15.3).

**Table 15.3** Program descriptions

|                        | English Studies                                    | Liberal Arts  | Green Science   |
|------------------------|--|---|---|
| Pedagogical approaches | EAP → EMI  | EMI   | EMI   |
| Student cohort         | NNES + some bilingual bicultural Japanese students | Mostly bilingual and bicultural Japanese and international students | Mostly bilingual and bicultural Japanese and international students |
| Faculty cohort         | NESTs and (Japanese) NNESTs                        | NESTs and NNESTs  | NESTs and NNESTs  |

Some courses taught in English at Sophia are more language-based while other classes are heavily content-based. As of 2015, there are four other programs at Sophia with courses conducted in

## Making the EFL to ELF transition in English-Medium Instruction at a Global Traction University

English that are not included in this study. One program is in the Center for Language Education and Research, which is strictly focused on language learning; another is in the English Literature department, offering some content and skills-based courses in English; another is in the Faculty of Economics, offering third-year English in Management and Economics courses; and still another is the Global Discovery program which offers English-medium courses as well as Japanese-medium courses.

### **Methods**

Data were collected through classroom observations and interviews with professors. For the classroom observations, one lesson was observed per instructor. The procedure for the analysis of observation data involved examining each of the four observed classes against the EFL vs ELF and ELT vs GELT frameworks to see how each program met the criteria of ELF and GELT. Two interviews were conducted with instructors (given single-letter pseudonyms for anonymity); the first was conducted within a few days following the classroom observation. The interviews were semi-structured and, in order to ascertain the instructors' awareness of the intentions of Sophia's participation in the Top Global University Project, focused on questions surrounding their intentions in the course regarding the use of English, and their understanding of *global studies*. The first interview was focused more specifically on the classroom observation, while the second interview, conducted at the end of the semester, allowed the instructors more of an opportunity to explain the course descriptions while reflecting on the previous interview. Each interview was approximately 30 minutes and was audio-recorded and transcribed.

### **Results and Findings**

Data collected from program descriptions and interviews were analyzed according to three criteria: pedagogical approaches, student cohort and faculty cohort (see Table 15.3). It was noted from the program descriptions that pedagogical approaches were not overtly described, so instructors were asked to elaborate. While the two ETPs were simply described as being conducted in English (and therefore labeled as EMI), the English program was described as moving pedagogically from an EAP to EMI focus, as students now focus more on cultural and content studies, rather than language development, as the department has elected to hire more content professors rather than linguists.

#### **Meeting the ELF and GELT criteria**

In terms of how the observed classes fit into program descriptions, the observation notes were used

## Making the EFL to ELF transition in English-Medium Instruction at a Global Traction University

to complete Table 15.4 showing seven criteria that represent the most pertinent of the six criteria of the ELF analytical framework (Jenkins, 2006) and the nine criteria of the GELT analytical framework (Galloway & Rose, 2015). Details of observations and interview data provide the specific case for each EMI program at Sophia.

**Table 15.4** Three programs analyzed using the combined ELF and GELT frameworks

|  | English Studies | Liberal Arts | Green Science |
|--|-----------------|--------------|---------------|
| Difference perspective                 | O               | X/O          | X/O           |
| Away from monolingual bias             | X/O             | X            | X             |
| Code-switching and mixing a resource   | X               | X            | X             |
| Target interlocutors and cultures NNEs | O               | O            | O             |
| Teacher variance (NNEs and NESTs)      | X               | X/O          | X/O           |
| Role models (successful ELF users)     | X               | O            | O             |
| C1 and L1 seen as resource             | X/O             | X            | X             |

X, Not observed/not present; O, observed/present; X/O, mixed data.

### Case studies

#### *Case one: Professor E, English Studies*

The English department at Sophia shifted its focus away from language several years ago (prior to G30 funding) by changing its name from the Department of English Language and Studies to simply the Department of English Studies. Although the department continues to offer language classes, much of the focus has shifted to EMI. While there are a number of linguists in the department, recently political scientists and historians have been hired; indicating the content aspects of studying *about* English language cultures (specifically only American and British), and not necessarily *in* English, are taking a greater role. The observation took place in a humanities elective course. In the department, differences in English proficiencies are remarkable since some students are *kikokushijo* [returnees, Japanese nationals who lived for extended periods outside Japan] while others have never been outside Japan. The humanities course was conducted entirely in English. Professor E, a native English-speaking teacher, suggested that some students dropped

## Making the EFL to ELF transition in English-Medium Instruction at a Global Traction University

this course probably owing to a lack of language proficiency, as students were required to use English with each other (although occasional use of Japanese was acceptable, and code-switching was observed). The teaching approach was essentially lecture-based, but balanced with pair work or group work. Professor E had a background in TESOL, and therefore felt confident providing language support to students. For example, students were given a glossary that included difficult vocabulary. Some time was spent focusing on language aspects in which students frequently make errors, suggesting more of an EFL than ELF learning context.

Professor E's planned learning outcomes for the course indicated that writing and presentations accounted for most of the evaluation. The main aim was to understand and learn content, but students were also expected to learn *English skills*. Language use was therefore included in students' evaluation. In terms of presentations, evaluation with regard to language use had to do with comprehensibility rather than fluency. In this way, returnees did not have an advantage over other students. Professor E explained that returnees have a tendency to speak too quickly or use difficult vocabulary without explaining it. For both writing and speaking, students received feedback about language such as grammar, vocabulary and organization. However, these language aspects were not as important as content, which was a main factor for evaluation.

### *Case two: Professor F, Faculty of Liberal Arts*

The Faculty of Liberal Arts is Japan's longest running English-taught program, modeled on American liberal arts programs. Students in the program major in international business and economics, social sciences or humanities. The course selected for this study was in the humanities and the observation took place in a lecture-based lesson. The atmosphere in the class was a stark contrast from the English Studies class as the majority of the class was made up of foreign (mostly American) exchange students.

In the class observed, the instructor spoke on content for about half of the class time, and then interacted with students about related content. There was some interaction between students during small group discussions involving mixed groups of local and international students. However, there was some imbalance in the groups as those with international backgrounds spoke more than others, and there was no language support in the class as it focused entirely on content. In the interview, Professor F, a native English-speaking teacher, explained that language support was provided outside the classroom to students during office hours on a more individual basis.

The learning outcomes for this course were centered on Japanese culture, and Professor F pointed out that, in order to learn essential concepts, writing is integral since it contributes to the better

## Making the EFL to ELF transition in English-Medium Instruction at a Global Traction University

understanding of the topic, clarifying,

It is really easy to have a vague idea in a literature class [requiring students to make their own interpretations], but it is much harder to have a really concrete and fully explored idea that you write down in your paper. (Professor F)

Professor F took into consideration the difficulty that Japanese students who have graduated from schools in Japan experience when studying content in English. For example, the amount of reading was set at a relatively low level compared with similar courses taught in universities in the United States. Professor F also tried to provide opportunities for all students to talk, in some cases, during classroom discussion, explaining that foreign students tend to dominate classroom discussion owing to their cultural background and, to some extent, the insufficiency of English proficiency of Japanese students. Professor F felt that, while their English proficiency is high, free discussion about complex ideas is a particularly challenging aspect for them. As for course assessment, it was heavily content-based. Professor F marked down scores in terms of language aspects only if the use of language was so problematic that it interfered with the content of the paper. This allowed for students with lower English language proficiency to avoid being disadvantaged by poor grammar or limited vocabulary.

### *Case three: Professor G, Green Science*

The Green Science program is within the Faculty of Science and Technology. The program, launched in 2012 and offered by the Department of Materials and Life Sciences, was started as part of Sophia's participation in the G30 Project and is fully English taught. The observed lesson was a highly technical lecture on a hard science and there was very little interaction between the instructor and the students. There were only two students in the class, owing to the fact that the program is still new. The enrolment for the entire program at the time of data collection was just 11 students.

Several findings were obtained through the interview. The instructor's approach to teaching reflected personal sink-or-swim experiences studying in a second language in high school and university. Because of these experiences, Professor G, a non-native English-speaking teacher, felt that students do not need to wait until they master a foreign language. The belief was that they can learn it naturally through taking classes in an ELF learning environment. Therefore, Professor G was not concerned with providing language support.

Students who belong to this new program are from different countries including various Asian and

## Making the EFL to ELF transition in English-Medium Instruction at a Global Traction University

European countries, the United States and Japan. The majority of students are foreign students, but many have already lived in Japan for a considerable time. A number of them graduated from international schools in Japan. Professor G explained that for those who wish to pursue a university life in Japan, there are in fact few university programs that offer science courses such as biology, chemistry or medical science taught entirely in English. Thus, this program aims to attract such students. Professor G felt that the English proficiency level of the students was sufficient to manage their studies in the program. As for course assessment, students were required to submit reports. The final report was the most important and in it, language aspects were included for evaluation. According to Professor G, doing such assignments encourages students to learn how to write an academic essay, but lessons on how to write an essay were not included in the course as students take academic writing courses as part of the Green Science program.

### **Discussion**

From these observations and interviews, it is evident that the three different cases at Sophia cover the spectrum from EFL and ELT to ELF and GELT. For the professors who speak English as a first language, teaching approaches were remarkably different. For example, Professor F, in the ELF learning environment of the Faculty of Liberal Arts, who had a majority of foreign exchange native English-speaking students, maintained a lecture-based lesson more along the lines of a content-driven lesson. Alternatively, Professor E, in the EFL learning environment of the English Studies department, who had mainly Japanese students with various levels of English proficiency, utilized an approach more commonly found in language learning environments, giving questions to students and providing a number of opportunities for students to do pair work and group work.

Regarding the support students were given for both content and language, differences were also significant. For example, Professor E explained that reading assignments were chosen carefully – comprehensible and not too difficult for students. Students were also given glossaries that contained difficult or technical words. Furthermore, students were provided with content support. There were regular comprehension check questions and writing tasks focused on what students found difficult about content. Students were required to review what they learned briefly in the next class. Alternatively, Professor F offered language support only in individual consultations outside of class time. Professor G did not offer any language support.

In terms of GELT approaches, strong transformations toward a global application of English were observed. While it is recognized in GELT that code-switching and utilizing students' first language (L1) and first culture (C1) (observed in the English Studies class) are *global approaches*, the

## Making the EFL to ELF transition in English-Medium Instruction at a Global Traction University

reduced difference perspective, varied cultural backgrounds of teachers as role models and lessons that avoided targeting NES interlocutors indicate that all three of these programs are achieving what Sophia promotes as *global studies*. With some careful planning, these programs could diversify their student cohorts more to include a balance of domestic and international students. They could provide language support only where necessary for those who need it, and opportunities for interaction between the two groups.

The range of different courses offered and the diversity of student groups taking them is part of Sophia's promotional rhetoric. This means that there are a variety of opportunities, some EFL, some ELF, for students to gain a number of benefits in areas such as content, language, thinking processes and culture. Therefore, one of the keys to solving the problems experienced in the G30 Project, and potential problems for the Top Global University Project, could be the collaboration of different programs – collaboration in order to help students participate successfully in EMI, which makes it possible for both local and foreign students to take various classes across programs. In this way, two of the major criticisms of the G30 Project, the exclusion of local Japanese students from integrated EMI programs and the difficulty faced by international students in engaging with Japanese culture and language, can be solved. This could be seen in at least one of the ELF/GELT contexts at Sophia where interactions between local Japanese students and international students occur in multicultural groups in the ETP of the Faculty of Liberal Arts. However, in order for a successful balance of opportunities for students from various backgrounds and language proficiencies to be obtained, adequate language support is necessary. The consideration of balance of language and support might be the key to the success to EMI in Japan.

### References

- Burgess, C., Gibson, I., Klaphake, J. and Selzer, M. (2010) The 'Global 30' Project and Japanese higher education reform: An example of a 'closing in' or an 'opening up'? *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 8 (4), 461–475.
- Galloway, N. and Rose, H. (2015) *Introduction to Global Englishes*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Gardner, R. (2010) Sophia University's Faculty of Liberal Arts. *Sophia International Review* 30, 1–10.
- Hashimoto, K. (2013) 'English-only', but not a medium-of-instruction policy: The Japanese way of internationalising education for both domestic and overseas students. *Current Issues in Language Planning* 14 (1), 16–33.
- Jenkins, J. (2006) Current perspectives on teaching world Englishes and English as a lingua franca. *TESOL Quarterly* 40 (1), 157–181.
- MEXT (2014a) Global 30, Sophia University. See [http://www.uni.international.mext.go.jp/university\\_list/sophia/Activities/Index/](http://www.uni.international.mext.go.jp/university_list/sophia/Activities/Index/) (accessed 30 December 2014).

## Making the EFL to ELF transition in English-Medium Instruction at a Global Traction University

MEXT (2014b) Selection for the FY 2014 Top Global University Project. See

[http://www.mext.go.jp/b\\_menu/houdou/26/09/\\_\\_\\_icsFiles/\\_afieldfile/2014/10/07/1352218\\_02.pdf](http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/houdou/26/09/___icsFiles/_afieldfile/2014/10/07/1352218_02.pdf)

Rose, H., & McKinley, J. (2017). Japan's English-medium instruction initiatives and the globalization of higher education. *Higher Education*, advance access online 22 February, 1-19.