Allo-repetition in academic settings. Cooperation, understanding co-construction and knowledge negotiation in the medical section of the ELFA corpus

In recent years, spoken academic ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) has been an object of increasing interest in linguistic and communication studies thanks to the position of academia as “one of the domains which have most eagerly adopted English as their common language in international communication” (Mauranen 2006a: 146). In a context where different linguistic and cultural backgrounds come together, clarity and explicitness play a prominent role. In this respect, ELF research has paid much attention to the importance of communicative strategies, the most prominent of which is repetition.

ELF studies on repetition have been carried out in several domains, including academia. Within this, however, medical discourse, and more specifically, spoken medical discourse, to date has been neglected. This is quite surprising given the ever-growing medical research output in the English language, which has resulted in an increasing number of literacy programs within EMP (English for Medical Purposes), thus in turn intensifying the use of English as an instrument of international higher medical education. Moreover, academia makes use of several forms of speech, traditionally lectures, seminars, conferences, panel discussions, etc., but spoken discourse still remains less investigated as compared to written contexts. This paper is intended to be a continuation and development of a previous study on self-repetition (Cappuzzo forthcoming), and focuses on the role of allo-repetition in the 63,029-word subcorpus of nine polylogic speech events belonging to the 100,135-word section of spoken academic medical interactions included in the one million-word ELFA (English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings) corpus. More specifically, following Kaur’s (2009) analysis of interactional devices in co-construction understanding in English as a lingua franca, this paper concentrates on the communicative functions served by allo-repetition in the meaning-making process and understanding co-construction in a medical academic ELF context involving speakers of several different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The paper first reports relevant literature on repetition and allo-repetition strategy. It subsequently shows the findings of the research and examines the functions displayed by allo-repetition in the data, with extracts illustrating the different functions. Occurrences of such cohesive devices falling into the category of repetition
as superordinates, hyponyms, and synonymic expressions will also be taken into consideration as useful strategies enhancing clarity and giving discourse coherence. Finally, the paper discusses some didactic implications from the results obtained and offers suggestions on how allo-repetition can be deployed in EMP syllabuses. The main purpose of the work is to highlight how allo-repetition as an interactive process between speakers contributes to increasing understanding, constructing an atmosphere of cooperation, establishing and/or re-establishing shared understanding in knowledge negotiation at an international spoken academic level in the medical field.