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FACTORS OF ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA

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Abstract: *This paper was written in order to reveal factors of English as a lingua franca in Asia by observing naturally occurring interactions with the participants. The author collected the data through a university project in Tokyo, and the participants sharing various backgrounds. The collected data showed a number of curious results. (a) English that the participants used in the research site had some strategies. (b) Although the participants understood the English requirement for the workplace, they probably intentionally switched the language between English and Japanese; localized code-switching was frequently seen. (c) Japanese used in the research site might have been used to mitigate face threatening acts or to make membership markers.*

Key words: *ELF, code-switching, FTAs, membership marker.*

1. Introduction

People have different styles of communication; the ways in which we speak, listen and behave are all different from each other. I found that there were differences in communication styles when I studied abroad in Australia where there were many people from all over the world.

Therefore, last year I attempted to investigate what elements influence certain communication styles. I discovered that English used in the real world was different from the English taught at Japanese high school.

Following my pilot research (2012), I will be focusing on English as a lingua franca (ELF). My research attempts to identify 'Factors of English as Lingua Franca' because I would like to know what English usage in the real world looks like. Nowadays, English has become a widespread language in the world, known as English as a lingua franca (Seidlhofer 2005). In other words, English is not just for native speakers such as Americans, British and Australians but also for a multiple of people such as Asians. McArthur (2003) argued that this was naturally caused by the increased interactions between Westerners and Asians in business for various political and economic reasons. Because of this, English usage has changed.

For my research, I will examine the factors of ELF which were actually researched before in an European context, but not in Asia. Firth (2009) described that there were mainly two factors for ELF; Metatheory and Entailment. Metatheory is a concept that the present usage of English cannot be explained by traditional applied linguistic theories; English is what native speakers and non-native speakers co-

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construct together. On the other hand, Entailment is a concept which states that there are specific strategies which occur in ELF. An example of this is back-channeling, which is a response such as 'Ah huh' or 'Okay'
(Tanaka 2008). Consequently, I would like to know what the ELF factors are in an Asian context.

For the current research, in order to explore what English usage in an Asian context is like, the data were collected from a project in my university whose participants are Japanese university students as well as international volunteers from various countries. The collected data are based on recordings of conversations which occurred naturally through their interaction on the project in daily communication. Regarding the current use of English in the world, this study will be meaningful for people who might have an interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds.

2. Literature review

In this study, two conceptual frameworks were employed for analysis. The first framework is a concept of ELF argued by Firth (2009). According to Firth, ELF consists of two elements, Entailment and Metatheory. The second framework is code-switching discussed by Barredo (1997).

2.1. ELF

ELF itself is a concept that has been discussed by many researchers over a decade (e.g. Firth 2009, McArthur 2003, and Seidlhofer 2005). "The term, ELF has emerged as a way of referring to communication in English between speakers with different first languages." (Seidlhofer 2005: 339). ELF interactions take place among non-native English speakers and may also include sometimes native English speakers som. Furthermore, Firth (2009) considers that ELF has two components, which details will be presented:

Entailment

In most cases, ELF users share neither a common native tongue nor a common culture, and ELF is 'a contact language' to communicate with each other (Firth 1996). Meierkord (2004) asserts that ELF "emerges out of and through interaction", and she added that "it might well be that ELF never achieves a stable or even standardized form" (p. 129). Firth (2009) noted that there are a number of strategies that are often seen in ELF conversation; ELF users activate complex pragmatic strategies to help them negotiate their variable form. For instance, strategies such as "let it pass" and "make it normal" appear to be commonly deployed. Other examples are that ELF users might borrow, use and re-use each other's language forms, produce nonce words, and switch and mix languages (Firth 2009).

Metatheory

Firth (2009) argued that major theories within applied linguistics are being revised and redrawn by reason of social constructionism and post-structuralism. He also mentioned that post-structuralism is conducive to the change of the English usage (Firth 2009). It means, in my understanding, English used to be a language that was learnt through textbooks in school, based on traditional applied linguistic assumptions; however, now English is no longer a formed and governed language but a language that is possibly changing and shapeless. 'English' might be varied across the 'ages'.

In order to deal with the complexity of lingua franca usage, we might need to view language not deducted from linguistic theory but induced from observation of social uses.

2.2.Code-Switching

Code-switching has been discussed by a number of researchers: one of them was Barredo (1997). In this study, the term code-switching was regarded as "the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems" (cited in Barredo 1997: 528). In his paper, he focused on some discourse/pragmatic functions of Basque-Spanish code-switching. Barredo explained that code-switching was a common phenomenon among Basque-Spanish bilinguals.

Through the research, Barredo concluded that a wide variety of purposes were seen in Basque-Spanish bilinguals' code-switching as other researchers had also previously revealed. Examples of instances of multiple functions and strategies are as follows: to organize or structure discourse, to change the topic by implying to move on to another topic, maintain the authority of utterance among the speakers.

In addition, switching between languages was considered as an important tool to ease up the negative connotation of utterances, likewise to add some humorous and/or ironic remarks.

Though the participants in Barredo's study were balanced bilinguals of Spanish and Basque, there are some similarities between his study and the present research.

These two above-mentioned conceptual frameworks are chosen to analyze the data efficiently. Focusing on ELF itself as well as code-switching, I would like to investigate factors of ELF in Asia.

3. Methodology

This section introduces Conversation Analysis (CA) which I employ to approach my research question, two data collection methods, the research site and the participants.

3.1. Approach

The author believes that the most suitable methodology for the present research is CA, in order to approach the research question; What are the factors of ELF in Asia? 'CA is the study of recorded, naturally occurring talk-in-interaction.' (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008). CA was chosen in this study because of its effectiveness in undertaking objective analysis.

3.2. The research site

The data were collected from MSSP (Meisei Summer School Project) in 2013. MSSP is a student-centered project funded by Meisei University and supported by two non-government organizations (NGOs). Meisei students and international volunteers from various countries cooperate to offer free English classes to local children. An intensive English course is offered for two weeks, consisting of one preparation week and another teaching week during local children's summer vacation. In 2013, eighty-one Meisei students, sixteen international volunteers of thirteen different nationalities, and one-hundred and fifty children between six years old and fifteen years old participated in MSSP. Because the participants of MSSP were not only Japanese, English was always required to understand each other: they had to speak English to make and share teaching plans, prepare teaching materials and have lunch and meetings together.

While MSSP is in session, international volunteers stay in a guesthouse, which is called "*Geihinkan*", from the week before MSSP is open until it ends. In *Geihinkan*, there were two leaders who were sent from the NGO to support international volunteers during their stay in 2013. One of the leaders always stayed there.

In addition to international volunteers and the leaders, two different Japanese students stayed in *Geihinkan* every day to help and to interact with the international volunteers. Therefore, nineteen people having a mix of gender, age, nationality, culture, religion and mother tongue, usually slept in *Geihinkan* every night.

All of the data for this thesis were collected in the dining room of *Geihinkan*. *Geihinkan* is a place where volunteers and students from various backgrounds live together. The dining room of *Geihinkan* is a common space for everybody. The dining room was the room where interactions between the participants took place the most without restrictions of gender, age, nationality, culture and religion.

The reasons why the researcher collected the data in *Geihinkan* were as follows: firstly, the author acted as a student assistant of MSSP as well as one of the guesthouse leaders, so the data were collected whenever it was desired to record the video.

Secondly, as mentioned before, *Geihinkan* was the ideal location where I was able to investigate people from various social and linguistic backgrounds. Lastly, the common language used to communicate with each other in *Geihinkan* was English.

In other words, ELF was used in *Geihinkan*. The three reasons mentioned above made the research site an optimal setting to gather the data of the real usage of ELF in Asia.

3.3. Data collection methods

Two data collection methods, video recording and audio recording were used to collect the data by means of CA. In order to see the conversations as they naturally occurred in the guesthouse between various people, the author assumed that setting a video camera on a laptop and recording randomly in the dining room was the best way to observe the interactions between participants. Because the recording device was often present, but not always recording, participants were not always aware that they were being recorded, which made it possible to record natural interaction.

Video and audio recording were employed for CA. These two data collection methods are needed in order to see naturally occurring conversation by the participants and expand analytical possibility. Employing not just voice recording but also video recording gave more reliability and validity to analyze conversation; moreover, potential visual data such as body language could be observed by using video recording.

3.4. Participants

The research participants were international volunteers and some Meisei students, who stayed in *Geihinkan*. The following table shows the details of the participants who were directly involved in the collected data.

Table 1

Participants involved in the collected data

Name	Sex	Country	Japanese level	Age
Alan	M	Czech Republic	Elementary	21
Gracie	F	Singapore	Upper Intermediate	20
Kazuki	M	Japan	Fluent	21
Maria	F	Russia	Lower Intermediate	19
Patrick	M	Ukraine	Intermediate	24

4. Data Analysis

All the data were collected by video and audio recording in the dining room of the guesthouse to observe naturally occurring conversation among the participants. Twelve videos in total were recorded for a three and half hours were, the data showed some frequently occurring patterns in those recorded videos. Two features of ELF and code-switching appeared through the data. These observed patterns are presented in the following four pieces of video data.

In video 1, the participants were preparing for dinner, and several strategies of ELF were seen. Alan from The Czech Republic tried to do something with plates, yet nobody seemed to understand what he wanted to do. Kazuki, a Japanese student wearing a pink T-shirt, asked "Do you wanna sit?" to Alan. Alan replied "Shit? … Sit?" After that, the others probably thought he wanted to put what he had on the table. A girl from Singapore said "Just put it here" and others helped. However, what he intended to do was different.

Video 1

The author observed several strategies of ELF such as 'backchanneling' (Tanaka 2011) and 'let it pass' (Firth 1996) in video 1. Firstly, when Alan repeated what Kazuki said, backchanneling was used. According to Tanaka (2006), backchanneling is a strategy to make sure what the interlocutor said by repeating the word or sentences. Secondly, the others reacted in their ways though what Alan tried to do was unclear; they passed it. Firth noted that 'let it pass' is a strategy for ELF; "the hearer thus lets the unknown or unclear action, word or utterance 'pass' on the (common-sense) assumption that it will either become clear or redundant as talk progresses." (1996: 243). Consequently, two strategies for ELF, 'backchanneling' and 'let it pass' were observed in the data.

As was already mentioned in previous chapters, the participants had to communicate with each other using English during MSSP, and their time in the guesthouse was the part of MSSP. Video 2 emphasizes that they understood that they had to speak English. Patrick from Ukraine suddenly started taking pictures of people around him. One of them, Maria from Russia told him in Russian that he should have asked the permission to take photos of them. Then Patrick said to her to speak English.

Video 2

Through the data, the reason why Patrick asked Maria to speak English was probably because Yuzhou said "Ahh?" Yuzhou did not understand Russian at all; he and other people could not follow the conversation. The similar data that show the participants were aware of the requirement of English were taken twice in different times with different people. Japanese language such as greetings, a few words and short sentences were frequently seen in the data by non-Japanese participants as well as Japanese sometime. In other words, code-switching between English and Japanese was seen in the data many times. Video 3 is one of the examples. Patrick told Yuzhou from China not to pour alcohol any more by saying 'Kekko desu/ kekko.'which means, in Japanese, 'no, thank you.' in this case.

Video 3

Patrick said "Kekko desu/ kekko." to refuse Yuzhou's offer to drink more. It seemed that Patrick has softly rejected by using Japanese instead of English. That means Patrick might have used Japanese to mitigate face threatening act (FTAs). FTAs, argued by Roberts (1991), are certain behavior when people do something negative to their company. Patrick employed positive politeness to not make Yuzhou feel worse. Patrick possible employed code-switching from English to Japanese to ease up on making Yuzhou feel uncomfortable by saying "Kekko desu." There were a number of utterances of Japanese language in other data too. In video 4, there are eight participants in the room. Two of them are invisible on the screen, with only their voices heard.

Alan greeted all the participants in the room, except one Mexican participant, with a hug by saying "Oyasumi/ oyasuminasai" in Japanese, which means good night. Likewise, all the participants except one American replied to him by using "oyasumi" in Japanese. Alan greeted only one participant from Mexico "good night" in Spanish; code-switching between English and Spanish was also seen in video 4.

Video 4

In video 4, which is two minutes and fifteen seconds in length, oyasumi/oyasuminasai were used in total twenty times (eleven times by Alan: nine times by the others) not including "good night" in English. Video 4 was taken on the last night in the guesthouse. By this time everyone had a close relationship with each other, and it was time to say good bye. It can be observed that code-switching "oyasumi" was used as a 'membership marker' to show peer identity.

To sum up, data analysis reveals that ELF in the guesthouse contains several strategies. In addition, code-switching between English and Japanese commonly appeared in the data, and it was localized; furthermore, Japanese used in the guesthouse were applied for mitigation of FTAs (Roberts 1991) and for membership marker.

5. Conclusion

In this study, the researcher observed interaction among people from different cultural backgrounds, data were collected through video and audio recordings in the guesthouse. In conclusion, the author found out that ELF in the guesthouse

composed of a number of interesting and unexpected features specific to ELF strategies and code-switching.

As the previous researchers revealed, certain strategies for ELF such as 'backchanneling (Tanaka 2008)' and 'let it pass (Firth 1996)' were commonly seen in the data. In addition, although they understood that they had to speak English in the guesthouse, they frequently switched the languages from English to another language. When it happened, localized code-switching between English and Japanese was used the most.

Through the data, it can be observed that there are two purposes for code-switching: mitigation for FTAs (Roberts 1991) and making membership marker. The participants may have sometimes switched to Japanese to reduce the nuance of utterances that sound impolite or not nice to say directly in English. Also, they might have used Japanese to make membership markers in order to show that they belong to the same community or society by saying 'Japanese' as if by code. It is firstly because their English was high enough to convey what they wanted to say when they changed to Japanese.

Secondly, it is because Japanese used in the guesthouse was so basic that the majority of participants understood what they meant, otherwise they could skip the Japanese since every time it was not important to understand the meaning of the conversation. They could move on to the next topic without problems. Accordingly, factors of ELF in the guesthouse were a variation of English that has ELF strategies and localized code-switching.

In this paper, the data were collected in the guesthouse used by a part of a university project. The participants share many differences, such as culture, language and age. Despite the common language for the project being English, the usage of Japanese for code-switching was seen in the data, which was not expected.

The author believes that more research for ELF factors is required since there might be more ELF interactions with people from different backgrounds in the future.

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