



An exploration of the communication strategies used when culture-laden words are translated from Japanese to Arabic in ELF interaction



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study described in this paper is to support the development of intercultural ELF pedagogy by connecting Kirkpatrick's (2007a) lingua franca approach to English language education with Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence through action research. Conducted in an English language course at a university in southern Japan by a British and a Libyan teacher-researcher, it explores the communication strategies used during the translation of culture-laden Japanese words into Arabic in real-time interaction using English. Audio-recorded data of five dialogues in which ten Japanese students attempted to teach the Libyan teacher-researcher culture-laden Japanese words in English to elicit translations into Arabic were transcribed and analysed by extending and adapting Kirkpatrick's (2007b) list of ELF communication strategies. Ethical issues were duly considered. A range of communication strategies will be presented that can be incorporated into materials and methods, which may potentially be expanded upon by drawing on existing communication strategy research. The implications of such an approach will be considered in relation to the setting of learning objectives, task and syllabus design, and the role of teachers and students as intercultural mediators. The appropriateness of the approach in different cultural contexts will also be considered.

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Introduction

Those who use English as a second language or lingua franca already greatly outnumber native-speakers for whom English is the first language (The University of Southampton, 2013), and the development of intercultural communication skills is vital as people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds interact. Cogo and Dewey (2012) have linked English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) with intercultural communication by defining ELF as “communication that takes place among speakers from various linguacultural backgrounds (e.g. a group made up of an Argentinian speaker, a French speaker and a Somali speaker) interacting in English, and making use of the language as a contact language or lingua franca” (p. 26). In this process,

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the linguistic and cultural barriers arising when three or more languages and cultures are in play when ELF is used need to be overcome as two or more cultures interact through English. But how should English teachers respond?

Recognising the difficulties of codifying ELF for pedagogical purposes given the many varieties of English, Kirkpatrick (2007a) proposes a three-pronged lingua franca approach to English language education based on (1) the goal of successful intercultural communication that highlights the linguistic features that can hinder mutual intelligibility, (2) the ways in which cultures can differ and the implications of such differences for intercultural communication, and (3) the communicative strategies that can facilitate successful intercultural communication. Further, Seidlhofer (2011) recommends infusing this approach with understandings of language awareness, communication strategies, intercultural communication, sociolinguistics and social psychology.

This paper reports on a study that explored the communication strategies used by students to facilitate the translation of culture-laden words from Japanese to Arabic through intercultural communication using ELF in a classroom setting in Japan. This introductory section will start by reviewing possible connections between intercultural communicative competence (ICC) (Byram, 1997) and ELF communication strategies (Kirkpatrick, 2007b). The rationale for investigating this link in relation to translation strategies will be established. A range of intercultural translation strategies will then be provided before an overview of the study is presented in the following section.

Intercultural communicative competence

Language is influenced by the natural, social and cultural environment and according to the weaker version of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, it shapes rather than determines our perception of the world. For this reason, learning foreign languages raises awareness “of the constraints of our language and world view and allows us to see what we have in common with other forms of speaking and thinking on deeper levels” (Bredella & Richter, 2013: 605). Teachers need to raise their awareness of similarities and differences between English varieties, and explore links between language and identity to equip learners to express their own sociolinguistic reality through English and make their speech intelligible to interlocutors from various language backgrounds (Jenkins, 2006).

The communication, identity and cultural functions of language may sometimes “be at odds with each other” (Kirkpatrick, 2007a: 10) as they may each require a different variety or register in different contexts. For this reason, ELF is likely to display less variation when used for international communication, when intelligibility is prioritised, than when its use is more localised and the need for cultural expression and social identification is fore-grounded as language use shifts strategically within the identity-communication continuum. However, the fact that ELF users “see the world in different ways” (Kirkpatrick, 2007a: 170) necessitates a bridging of the two extremes of the continuum if cultural diversity is to be preserved and stimulated. The need to communicate about culture and identity *intelligibly* is a central priority in intercultural communication, especially when the cultural gaps between the interlocutors are great, so ICC development is vital.

While ICC has been conceptualised in terms of knowledge, attitudes, the skills of discovery and interaction, the skills of interpreting and relating, and critical cultural awareness/political education in Byram's (1997) ICC model, an overview of which is presented in Appendix 1, the model has not been connected explicitly either with communication strategies, translation strategies, or with ELF. The lack of connection with the two strategy types can be explained by the fact that Byram's model evolved out of an earlier model (Byram & Zarate, 1994) developed for incorporation into the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001). The specific focus on the sociocultural aspect of communicative competence in Byram's model, and its predecessor, resulted in the exclusion of other components covered separately in other parts of the CEFR from both ICC models, and this included communication and translation strategies, neither of which were covered in Byram's model. Regarding its lack of connection with ELF, Byram's model was developed before ELF started to establish itself as a research field, and Byram's model was never limited to ELF communication in any case. It seems reasonable to connect Byram's model with Kirkpatrick's (2007a) three-pronged lingua franca approach to English language education, focusing specifically upon research into communication strategies that can facilitate successful intercultural communication given the lack of explicit attention paid to this in Byram's model.

Insofar as ELF communication requires the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills in real-time communication and interaction (Byram, 1997), it seems to fall within the *Skills of Discovery and Interaction* dimension of Byram's model (see Appendix 1) in connection with the ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices. The need to identify culturally significant references and connotations within this particular dimension highlights the need for communication and translation strategies to enable ELF users to interpret information about other cultures in relation to their own within the *Skills of Interpreting and Relating* dimension of Byram's model (see Appendix 1).

However, the lack of explicitness in the formulation of learning objectives related to communication and translation strategies makes it difficult for teachers to either teach them explicitly, or to even identify their natural emergence in student interaction. Further, the lack of teacher understanding of the ways in which communication strategies function in practice as an active component of ICC is problematic in itself. As Houghton (2014) notes, it has been over fifteen years since Byram's ICC model was first published in 1997, yet there is a dearth of published teaching materials prioritising ICC development, which also undermines the development of ICC assessment. While ICC assessment is not the focus of this article, one of its priorities is to make parts of the underlying ICC construct visible to help facilitate their assessment as they emerge in response to learning (Houghton, 2013, 2014; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2010). As Houghton (2014) notes, considering the development of the field as a whole, teacher-researchers working on the development of materials and methods should aim to make aspects of

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