



The dynamic identity construction in English as lingua franca intercultural communication: A positioning perspective



Mingyue (Michelle) Gu ^{a, *}, John Patkin ^b, Andy Kirkpatrick ^c

^a The Department of Curriculum and Instruction, The Faculty of Education, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, Hong Kong

^b Independent scholar

^c The School of Languages and Linguistics, Griffith University, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 27 May 2013

Received in revised form 19 June 2014

Accepted 11 July 2014

Available online

Keywords:

English as lingua franca

Identity

Power

ELF interaction

ABSTRACT

Drawing on positioning theory, this paper investigates the identity issues involved in an English as Lingua Franca (ELF) interaction in a multicultural university in Hong Kong. The findings indicate that the ELF participants' institutional roles are culturally determined, and are not fixed but vary in different phases of the discourse. This study suggests that the interlocutors move beyond language use in specific interactional context, and draw on their own histories and cultural knowledge to define and re-define the different positions of English language varieties in a broader context, so as to position their own English varieties at a privileged or advantageous position in the micro-interactional context. Despite the subtle negotiation of power relations they undertake, the ELF speakers in this study attempt to achieve alignment when a face-threatening episode occurs. It is found that ELF communication provides a context for interlocutors to see themselves through the lens of their embodied history and subjectivity and that of others, and to create new relationships and identities. The implications of the findings and future research direction are discussed.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the increasing number of non-local staffs and students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds has become a key indicator of internationalization in higher education. The continuing process of internationalization brings to the front the issue of communication in English, the unchallenged lingua franca of academia, among those whose first language is not English (Knapp, 2011). While there are established lines of research into the use of academic English in written texts, there is also an emerging body of research into the use of English as a lingua franca' (hereafter ELF) in oral discourse in academic settings (e.g., Björkman, 2008; Kirkpatrick, 2010a, 2011; Mauranen, 2006; Mauranen & Ranta, 2008). Such research has mainly focused on: 1) specific linguistic features of lingua franca communication in the academic domain; 2) comprehensibility and speakers' strategies for dealing with misunderstanding and for achieving understanding; and, 3) L1-related cultural and linguistic impacts on lecturers' and students' performance in institutionally- and contextually-defined roles.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +852 3943 3038.

E-mail addresses: mygu@cuhk.edu.hk, moongu1009@gmail.com (M. (Michelle) Gu), johnpatkin@gmail.com (J. Patkin), a.kirkpatrick@griffith.edu.au (A. Kirkpatrick).

We may find that, although there has been a considerable number of studies on newly-developed international norms that facilitate ELF communication, there is insufficient research on the ways in which identities and local cultures and values are negotiated (Canagarajah, 2006b). However, as communication and identification are inseparable in ELF and ELF-specific patterns of stance-taking exist (Baumgarten & House, 2010), there is a need to go beyond the current research focus on the content of ELF interactions in order to understand how ELF speakers develop cultural affinity with a range of Englishes, and how they use English to construct or present their identities.

As part of a larger project investigating English as Lingua Franca in an Asian context (Kirkpatrick, 2010b), this paper investigates the identity construction observed in a naturally-occurring ELF conversation between three ELF users from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds at a multicultural university in Hong Kong. This study contributes to the literature by exploring how work-related ELF communication in workplaces can contribute to the sharing of cultural knowledge and the construction of a multicultural identity among the interlocutors, which may, in turn, facilitate workplace communication. The paper begins by reviewing relevant studies on ELF communications; a framework for analysing ELF communication is then outlined, before the findings are presented and discussed.

2. Identity and power in ELF

The term 'ELF' refers to "communication in English between speakers with different first languages" (Seidlhofer, 2005, p. 339). Research on face-to-face interactions in ELF communication has recently gained a great deal of attention, mainly in studies focused on identifying core features of ELF phonology, or on morphosyntactic phenomena, lexis and syntax (Seidlhofer, 2004). Studies have also been done to classify the phonological and grammatical features of domain-specific languages (such as ELF) in academic settings (Björkman, 2008; House, 2003; Mauranen, 2003). In line with research on the phonological and lexicogrammatical features of spoken ELF interactions, studies on pragmatic intercultural communication and flexible approaches to language have indicated that interlocutors' pragmatic strategies may facilitate the maintenance of local English varieties (Baker, 2009). In addition, some recent studies have found that ELF users may either export their own primary culture into ELF, or re-invent their cultural identities by blending into other lingua-cultural groups (Jenkins, 2007; Li, 2009; Omoniyi, 2006; Sung, 2014; Virkkula & Nikula, 2010). Furthermore, power interplay has been found to be involved in the identity negotiation process in ELF communications (Cummins, 1996). These findings imply the necessity of addressing how ELF speakers adopt pragmatic strategies to facilitate communication, how their cultural identification impacts their language behaviours, and how they negotiate the power relations between different English varieties and the global status of different cultures to re-construct their identities and achieve local interests, in the micro-interactional context. The following paragraphs briefly review the extant studies on pragmatic strategies, identity construction and power interplay in ELF interaction.

Recent pragmatic studies of ELF have focused on the negotiation of meaning and the establishment of solidarity, with the help of shared linguistic resources (e.g., House, 2009). Knapp (2011), for example, based on data extracted from an engineering course at a German university, investigated the problems of learning and teaching via ELF; Knapp argued that, although participants from a variety of cultural backgrounds were able to successfully convey the pragmatic meaning of their utterances, they sometimes failed to choose appropriate speech acts, to negotiate forms of cooperation and to resolve conflicts. Seidlhofer (2004) argued that, in ELF communications, the pragmatic strategies interlocutors adopt to facilitate their use of local varieties also help them to maintain their own varieties, and that heterogeneity in language use can facilitate communication, contrary to the dominant linguistic assumption. It has also been found that local cultural interaction patterns influence ways of interacting in English, and that these culture-specific strategies serve to negotiate difference and ensure intelligibility (House, 2003). Moreover, according to Meierkord (2004), ELF speakers employ syntactic discourse strategies (such as segmentation and regularization) to facilitate communication, while still retaining the characteristics of their own English varieties. It is interesting to note that the language practices of members of Diaspora communities tend to shuttle between English varieties to construct new identities, in order to facilitate friendships and aid their socialization in local communities (Ibrahim, 1999; Rampton, 1995).

In recent years, the connection between identity and language use in ELF contexts has been explored. The cultural identification of interlocutors from different cultural groups may influence their language behaviours in ELF communication (Louhiala-Salminen, Charles, & Kankaanranta, 2005); furthermore, a cultural 'third place' is created among ELF professionals (Planken, 2005), who establish rapport by engaging in 'safe talk' related to "interculturalness" (Planken, 2005, p. 397), including reflexive comments on their own culture and differences, to create a temporary in-group of non-natives and share common ground.

Furthermore, Jenkins (2007, p. 43) stated that ELF interactions enable speakers' native-culture identities to "shine through"; referring to Omoniyi's (2006) identity hierarchies model, Jenkins identified 'identity-driven' as one possible factor explaining why speakers, who are well aware of native speaker norms, choose to signal a more desired identity by speaking an English variant that differs from those norms. In an empirical study involving a group of engineering students in Germany, Virkkula and Nikula (2010) found that access to new social and linguistic resources abroad resulted in the students adopting new identity repertoires; moreover, after experienced speaking and using English abroad, the students became willing to incorporate Finnish features into their English. Reluctant to identify fully with native speaker models, the students instead constructed ELF user identities.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6849597>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6849597>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)