An analysis of polyadic English as a lingua franca (ELF) speech: A communicative strategies framework

Beyza Björkman [a,b,*]

[a] *Department of English, Stockholm University, S-106 91 Stockholm, Sweden*
[b] *Unit for Language and Communication, Royal Institute of Technology, 100 44 Stockholm, Sweden*

Abstract

This paper reports on an analysis of the communicative strategies (CSs) used by speakers in spoken lingua franca English (ELF) in an academic setting. The purpose of the work has primarily been to outline the CSs used in polyadic ELF speech which are used to ensure communication effectiveness in consequential situations and to present a framework that shows the different communicative functions of a number of CSs. The data comprise fifteen group sessions of naturally occurring student group-work talk in content courses at a technical university. Detailed qualitative analyses have been carried out, resulting in a framework of the communication strategies used by the speakers. The methodology here provides us with a taxonomy of CSs in natural ELF interactions. The results show that other than explicitness strategies, comprehension checks, confirmation checks and clarification requests were frequently employed CSs in the data. There were very few instances of self and other-initiated word replacement, most likely owing to the nature of the high-stakes interactions where the focus is on the task and not the language. The results overall also show that the speakers in these ELF interactions employed other-initiated strategies as frequently as self-initiated communicative strategies.

© 2014 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

Keywords: English as a lingua franca (ELF); Communication strategies; Communicative effectiveness; Pragmatic ability; Cooperativeness; Academic speech

1. Introduction

The globalization that we are witnessing in the world today requires people from a wide spectrum of first languages and cultural backgrounds to communicate with each other through the use of English as a lingua franca. English is now undeniably the lingua franca in most of these encounters around the world and is seen as the "preeminent medium of international communication" (Ostler, 2010:3) in a large number of international domains. As a lingua franca, English has achieved such a global status that it has been compared to Latin as "the Latin of its time/our age/the modern world/the 20th (21st) century/the New Millennium/the masses" (Ostler, 2010:3).

Consequently, English as a lingua franca (henceforth ELF) has been receiving increasing attention in research and scholarly activity in general. Research into ELF started with some important pioneering work (e.g. Jenkins, 2000, 2007; Mauranen, 2003, 2005, 2006a,b; Seidlhofer, 2001, 2004), and the initiation of two major ELF corpora, i.e. ELFA (Corpus of

English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings[1]) and VOICE (Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English[2]) have provided data for several studies. This was followed by other on-going corpus and research projects, e.g. ACE (the Asian Corpus of English) the CALPIU corpus (Cultural and Linguistic Practices in the International University[3]) and GlobE,[4] a new project on Global English from Finland.

The studies on ELF over the last decade have provided us with important empirical descriptions of ELF usage. They have shown that, despite the many different L1 backgrounds in most ELF settings, commonalities emerge. We now know about the core phonological features (Jenkins, 2000), what type of phonological (Jenkins, 2000; Kirkpatrick, 2008) and morphosyntactic (Kirkpatrick, 2008; Seidlhofer, 2004; Breiteneder, 2005; Ranta, 2006; Björkman, 2008, 2010, 2013) commonalities to expect and how 'common' these features are compared to standard usage (Mauranen, 2006c; Björkman, 2010, 2013). With respect to ELF pragmatics, early work has focused on a selection of strategies and features (e.g. Firth, 1996; Wagner and Firth, 1997; House, 1999; Meierkord, 2000) as well as important descriptions of some pragmatic phenomena and the effort put into preventing misunderstanding in general (Mauranen, 2006b). More recent empirical work on the pragmatics of ELF has focused on subjectivity in ELF (House, 2009); habitat factor (Pölzl and Seidlhofer, 2006) and pre-empting strategies (e.g. Cogo, 2009; Kaur, 2010, 2011); chunking in ELF for managing interaction (Mauranen, 2009); pragmatic strategies used by international students (Björkman, 2011); mediation (Hynninen, 2011); and on the ways international students (mis)manage conflicts (Knapp, 2011).

To better understand the dynamics of ELF interactions, however, there is a need to further investigate the pragmatics of ELF usage and the communication strategies (CSs) used. The present paper attempts to undertake this task by means of a qualitative analysis of CSs in authentic spoken ELF. The qualitative analysis is supported with frequency counts to be able to provide a more complete picture of the nature of the ELF interactions studied. The study is a follow-up of the author's previous work on pragmatic strategies used by lecturers and students in spoken academic ELF (Björkman, 2011); it focuses on student group-work and presents a taxonomy of the different CSs observed in the data, rather than focusing on a single or small number of CSs.

2. Communication strategies and some important paradigmatic difference: From SLA to ELF

Communication strategies were first discussed within the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) paradigm more than four decades ago, constituting a new area of research. The first important pieces of work are Selinker's study on interlanguage and strategies used in L2 communication (1972), and Váradi (1980) and Tarone's (1977) studies where they discuss Selinker's work by providing an analysis of CSs, introducing many of the categories and terms used in the CSs research that followed. Subsequent to these early studies, a considerable amount of research was done in the late 80s and 90s to identify and classify CSs (e.g. Bialystok, 1990; Cook, 1993; Poulisse, 1987). In early work, the definition of CSs were limited to the ''insistance of problematicity'' (Kasper and Kellerman, 1997:2), which is clear in the definitions provided: CSs were defined as being employed ''to overcome *the crisis* which occurs when language structures are inadequate'' (Tarone, 1977:195, in Kasper and Kellerman, 1997:2); ''(to solve) what to an individual presents itself as *a problem*'' (Færch and Kasper, 1984:36, in Kasper and Kellerman, 1997: 2), ''to express [. . .] meaning when faced with *some difficulty*'' (Corder, 1981:1035), ''to compensate for *breakdowns* in communication. . .'' (Canale and Swain, 1980:30), to overcome ''gaps'' or ''problems'' (Coupland et al., 1991:3), and to ''achieve intended meaning on becoming aware of *problems* arising during the planning of an utterance'' (Poulisse et al., 1984:72, in Kasper and Kellerman, 1997:2) (emphasis added).

Concerns were raised on such inclusion of problematicity in the definition of CSs by some scholars (within speech act theory and other theories of pragmatics) who considered CSs as a spectrum of resources that speakers use to achieve their communicative aims (e.g. Bialystok, 1983). These other definitions are broader in that they include attempts to increase explicitness and effectiveness in CSs (Canale, 1983) instead of focusing only on difficulties speakers face. Færch and Kasper (1984), in their discussion of the 'interactional' vs. 'psycholinguistic' definitions of CSs, maintain that the psycholinguistic definition of CSs is broader and includes problems that may or may not be marked in performance. They maintain that ''advanced learners [. . .] can often predict a communicative problem well in advance and attempt to solve it beforehand'' (Færch and Kasper, 1984:61). Nevertheless, the consensus in early SLA research was that problematicity was definitional to CSs (Kasper and Kellerman, 1997:3).

Such insistence on problematicity is one of the reasons why CSs in lingua franca interactions need to be studied independently from the norms of the SLA paradigm. When using English as a lingua franca, speakers need to cope with a

---

[1] http://www.helsinki.fi/englanti/elfa/elfacorpus.

[2] http://www.univie.ac.at/voice/.

[3] http://calpiu.dk/.

[4] http://www.uef.fi/globe.