

A COMPARISON OF ELF, ENL AND ESL CONVERSATIONS

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1. Introduction

In this paper I am interested in enquiring about how people make use of their English-language repertoire in order to cross cultural and linguistic boundaries. My focus is on the use of English as a Lingua Franca which I aim to compare with English used as a Second, Additional or National language.

I am not, here, making any enquiries into the repertoire itself and I am not going to deal with language variety, rather I want to enquire about how people's use of their English repertoire in international settings might be different from their use of the same repertoire when they are using English NOT as a Lingua Franca.

In my general endeavour, I would situate my work in the same area as the early work carried out by Firth (1996), by Lesznyak (2002, 2004) who characterises ELF as a process, by House (2006) who focuses on use, rather than on development and acquisition and by Christiane Meierkord (2005) who, like Lesznyak, studies the processes that take place when different Englishes interact.

I also follow Lesznyak and Meierkord, in her more recent work, at least, in declaring an interest in looking at how a range of users, including native speakers, may make use of their language repertoire when using English as a Lingua Franca.

2. How I obtained my data

I got together some students at the University where I work and formed them into international groups of four or five per group. Each group had a conversation which I recorded. In order to obtain comparable data, the conversation was based on a simulation. I decided to use a simulation in order to obtain my data because this way I could reduce the variables, given that each group had the same simulation.

When I had obtained my recordings, I split the groups up and reformed them into groups of co-nationals. I then re-recorded the simulation.

I ended up with recordings of ten international conversations and ten conversations among co-nationals.

My focus here is on one international group, consisting of five speakers from China, Equatorial Guinea, Germany, Norway and The United States, and on the five corresponding national groups. My aim is to show how the people I recorded made different use of their English according to whether they were speaking with their co-nationals or in an international group.

3. Lexico-grammatical phenomena:

3.1 Third person singular present tense verbs

Inspired by Breiteneder's 2005 study, I looked for instances of unmarked verbs in the third person singular present. These instances are confined to two out of the five participants, Javier and Sofia. Their use of third person singular present forms is unstable, however, and the unmarked form seems to compete with 's' marked ones.

Other participants mark third person singular present tense verbs with an 's'.

Sofia's use of unmarked forms when she uses English as a Lingua Franca is not paralleled in her use of English among co-nationals, where she, like the other German users of English, marks all these forms with an 's'.

All the other participants also mark these forms when using English among co-nationals.

3.2 Use of 'that'

When using English as a Lingua Franca, all speakers use 'that' for anaphoric reference, something they also do when using English among co-nationals.

When it comes to other uses of 'that', the picture is a little different.

When using English with their co-nationals, Milne and Hao both use 'that' to introduce clauses after impersonal expressions ('it is important that..') or after verbs of thinking, knowing, reporting speech, etc. They do not do so when using English as a Lingua Franca.

Hedda and Milne both use 'that' as a relative pronoun when using English among co-nationals (as do many German users, but not Sofia). Only Milne uses 'that' in this way when using English as a Lingua Franca.

Sofia and Milne, when using English with their co-nationals, both use 'that' as a demonstrative adjective, something they do not do when using English as a Lingua Franca.

3.3 Lexical statistics

The overall lexical statistics show few differences between the ELF conversation and the parallel national ones:

4. Communication strategies

4.1 Laughter

In what seems like an attempt at co-operative behaviour, **Sofia** – makes use of laughter, seemingly to soften her message or to cover where she seems to lack other 'smoothing' strategies.

Altogether, Sofia laughs 12 times while delivering 332 words to the conversation. (1 in 27.6). In the conversation among Germans, there are 5 instances of laughter among 2,356 words (1 in 471). Two out of these five accompany Sofia's turns.

4.2 Downtoners

Quirk et. al. 's Grammar of Contemporary English in 1972 divides downtoners into several groups including Compromisers – 'kind of', 'sort of', Minimizers 'a bit' 'just' (also an amplifier) and Approximators

Hao makes systematic use of downtoners to soften his turns while the conversation among Chinese users has no instances at all of downtoning.

4.3 Discourse Strategy

For **Milne**'s entry into the conversation he uses an inductive discourse strategy, Milne's use of it may be justified as a deliberate move in order to accommodate to the others.

Neither Milne, nor any of the other American speakers ever use an inductive strategy to present their opinion/claim when talking among co-nationals.

5. Discussion

These results create the impression that when people make use of their English as a Lingua Franca (as opposed to using English when another language is shared or when English is being used among monolinguals) there are some small differences in lexico-grammar and some interesting changes in communication strategy. while participants draw on roughly the same lexico-grammatical repertoire to interact in international settings and in conversations among co-nationals, they make use of different conversational strategies. This seems to support the theory that ELF users participate in the creation of a co-culture (a 'third' culture – Meierkord) which does not necessarily draw on their home cultures.

The results also show that 'native speakers' follow the same procedures as 'non-native speakers' when required to use English in international settings.