Intercultural communicative competence

An English as a lingua franca perspective

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The lay of the land

❖ At the crossroads of different concepts and research interests

➢ Communication – competence - culture – intercultural communication - ELF

➢ Is ELF is culturally neutral and nor a vehicle for a speaker's identity
=> just a "transactional" language? [House 2003]

➢ Or do "ELF users develop their own markers of identity" [Hülmbauer 2007]

➢ Is it a "partner" language in a concert of other "national" languages that does not threaten but rather helps to sustain multilingual diversity? [Hülmbauer, Böhringer & Seidlhofer 2008]

❖ My aim in this talk

➢ is not to provide a comprehensive overview

➢ rather, my view – from a non-native speaker researcher perspective

➢ and with some hope for a coherent conclusion

❖ What is your perspective on ELF and culture and intercultural communication?

→ Is your ELF communication culturally loaded or neutral?

→ Are issues of identity at stake?

Conceptualizing ELF

❖ The language metaphor

  ➢ Typical definitions

  ➢ ELF as a "thing" – a language?

  ➢ However, is ELF a language at all?

❖ Imagine a group of speakers in an intercultural contact situation

  ➢ Colin, Khurshid, Yvonne and Felix

  ➢ Each of them will speak his/her OWN English:
     native language – second language – foreign language

❖ Everyone tries their level best to make things work

  ➢ Accommodation, negotiation etc. (all pervasive)

  ➢ ELF communication IS intercultural communication IS communication

To better understand all this let us go back to the roots

** From ELF to communication to intercultural communication **

[Kohn 2011]

My language – my English

[Kohn 2011, 2014; http://youtu.be/yCfpD49YhSg]

The constructivist nature of all our knowledge and skills – **a speaker's language is his/her own creation** – how do I acquire a language?

> ➢ I acquire a language by developing/constructing/**CREATING** my own version of it in my mind, my heart and my behavior

> ➢ Oriented toward **my** perception of the target language

> ➢ Influenced by my native language, my attitudes & motivation, my goals & requirements, my learning approach, the effort I invest, and the people I talk to and want to be with

> ➢ Not in isolation, but in communicative, **social** interaction with others

The English I develop is **my own**. And it is inevitably different from any target language toward which it is oriented.

– The social constructivist "My English" condition –

[part of the human condition for knowledge and learning]

Developing "My English" is about . . .

. . . developing my communicative-linguistic knowledge & skills

- lexical and grammatical means of expression
- how these can be used to fulfil language & communication-related requirements of performance
  - comprehensibility (⇐ feasibility)
  - grammatical accuracy (⇐ possibility)
  - situational appropriateness (⇐ acceptability, probability)
  - participation and self expression

cf. Hymes 1972

. . . developing my requirements of performance

- a little child in first language acquisition
- an immigrant in second language acquisition
- a ELT learner in lingua franca situations

. . . developing my individual and social identity orientation

- Who do I want to be? → e.g. am I comfortable with myself?
- What/who is my role model? → e.g. some kind of SE?
- By whom do I want to be accepted? → desire for participation?

Speaker satisfaction in ELF communication

Speaker satisfaction: more than complying with NS role models

❖ **Evidence from ELF performance**

- ▪ from our BACKBONE "natural narrative" interviews

  http://projects.ael.uni-tuebingen.de/backbone [> corpus search]

  Wiktor (Polish) [run]   Mustafa (Turkey) [run]

- ▪ from our TELF "Midwestern" discussions

  http://projects.ael.uni-tuebingen.de/telf [> TELF database DEMO]

  Edgar (Spanish) [run]   Priscilla (Italy) [run]

- ➢ ELF speakers creatively stretch and exploit their language resources
- ➢ They engage in accommodation, meaning negotiation and 'let it pass'
  - ⟶ BUT does this mean that ELF communication a success story?

❖ **Introspective insights from TELF**

- ➢ More often than not, speakers are dissatisfied with their own performance (according to their own individual requirements of performance) [see Albl-Mikasa 2009]
- ➢ They are usually more satisfied with other speakers' performance

❖ **Why should we be interested in speaker satisfaction at all?**

- ➢ Because it is a necessary & sufficient criterion of communicative success!

Challenges for successful communication

Speaker satisfaction depends on how well the speaker succeeds in coping with challenges for successful communication

- ❖ **Cognitive divergence** (cognitive challenges)
    - ➢ linguistic-communicative knowledge & skills: grammatical, socio-linguistic, discourse, strategic [Canale & Swain 1980, Bachman 2001, Leung 2005]
    - ➢ requirements of performance in general and situation-specific
    - ➢ background knowledge: factual, cultural, subject-specific, episodic, contextual
    - ➢ conceptualization of communication genres
    - ➢ conceptualization of the current communicative situation

- ❖ **Emotional divergence** (emotional challenges)
    - ➢ each speaker's emotional *(pre-)disposition*
    - ➢ emotional *relationship* between the speakers
    - ➢ emotional attitude towards specific manifestations of the cognitive forces

- ❖ **Behavioral divergences** (behavioral challenges)
    - ➢ Body language
    - ➢ General appearance

    ** Cultural distance tends to increase CEB divergences **

    ** Communicative success is impeded by CEB divergence **

assumptions about own/other con- & divergences

Learning to establish a 'third space'
of intercultural ELF communication

Conceptual reorientation: 'third space' creation instead of emulation of s.o. else's cultural space [Kramsch 2009]

❖ **Learning to cope with CEB divergences**

➤ Noticing & ascertaining, exploring, and reducing CEB divergences

➤ Related linguistic/communicative means of expression and moves

➤ Strategic processes of accommodation, meaning negotiation, and 'let it pass'

❖ **Facilitating conditions**

➤ Empathy, tolerance of ambiguity, behavioral flexibility [Byram 1997]

➤ Ability to explore and trust one's own NNS creativity [Kohn 2014]

❖ **Development through communicative participation**

➤ Communicative interaction in authentic speech fellowships or CofP

➤ Authentic & autonomous web-based communication & collaboration [Kohn & Warth 2011]

➤ To encourage and develop a NNS/learner's sense of OWNERSHIP [Widdowson 2003] & AGENCY to ensure speaker satisfaction and self-confidence

**NNS/learners of English are speakers of English
and not merely people learning English**

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Over to you

What is your opinion on the following statements:

- English as a lingua franca communication is per se intercultural.

- Communicative success is proportional to cognitive, emotional and behavioral convergence.

- Intercultural communicative competence is rooted in ordinary communicative competence.

- Intercultural communicative competence teaching needs to proceed from teaching communicative competence.

- Teaching English as a lingua franca crucially involves helping learners make English their own.

Thank you