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Rethinking “ELF users”: A Narrative Analysis of Inner and Outer Circle Teachers in Japan

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1. Introduction

The increased mobility of people and goods along with the advances of communication technology has led to an unprecedented level of language contact in today's globalized world. English has become “the global default lingua franca” (Mauranen, 2018, p. 7), distinguishing it from other contact languages due to the fact that non-native English speakers (NNESs) - those from the Outer and Expanding Circles in Kachru's (1986) model¹ - outnumber native English speakers (NESs) from the Inner Circle. In the discipline of English as a lingua franca (ELF), interactions are seen as inherently dynamic, hybrid, and context-dependent, in line with “²translingual practice” (Canagarajah, 2013). They sometimes diverge from Inner Circle speaker norms, because ELF interactants primarily place mutual intelligibility and effective communication at the heart. Whereas the unique nature and the significance of ELF have been highly acknowledged, Inner Circle varieties continue to be privileged in especially Expanding Circle contexts such as Japan (Aoyama, 2021; Ng, 2017). In principle, anyone using English for intercultural communication is considered as an ELF user (cf. Gnutzmann, 2004). However, possibly due to earlier conceptualization of Expanding Circle speakers as ELF users (e.g., Firth, 1996; House, 1999), empirical ELF studies have largely focused on Expanding Circle speakers. This study addresses this gap by comparing two excerpts from the interview narratives of an Inner Circle and an Outer Circle speaker, with a particular focus on their pragmatic aspect of use. The study examines how ELF pragmatic acts, translingual practice, and identities discursively emerge in each participant's narratives as interaction.

2. Literature review

2.1. English as a lingua franca (ELF)

The definition of ELF has evolved over the past two to three decades. Early research conceptualized ELF as interactions between members of two or more different linguacultures in English, for none of whom English is the mother tongue” (House, 1999, p.4). This study adopts Seidlhofer (2011)'s more inclusive definition: ELF as “any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option” (p. 7). Despite the widespread acceptance of this definition, empirical ELF studies continue to focus primarily on communication between NNESs. As a

¹ Kachru (1985) divides the presence of English into three concentric circles: The Inner Circle (e.g., the U.S., the U.K., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand), the Outer Circle (e.g., India, Malaysia, Singapore, and Philippines), and the Expanding Circle (e.g., Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Japan, China, Korea).

² Canagarajah (2013) conceptualizes “translingual practice” as the underlying orientation and set of processes that inform communicative modes in which strategies such as “code-meshing, crossing, and polyglot dialogue” are employed to achieve intelligibility (p. 6).