Changing Orientations to English During English-Medium Study Abroad in Thailand

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English as a lingua franca (ELF) scholarship has offered a number of pedagogical recommendations, emphasizing the negotiability of linguistic and cultural norms, the centrality of adaptability, and the relevance of multilingualism. However, despite its educational potential in cultivating participants' skills in these areas, study abroad in non-English-speaking countries has received limited attention. In a preliminary attempt to address this gap, this study traced a Japanese exchange student's changing perceptions of English during her yearlong sojourn in Thailand through 10 semistructured interviews. The analysis reveals a clear transformation of her attitudes to her peers' English(es) and to her own language use. Although she initially regarded native English as an object of admiration, she came to view communication in a utilitarian manner, departing from naïve adherence to established norms. The author argues that attitudinal changes are critical to ELF users because no single variety can be sufficient for dealing with diverse interlocutors.

共通語としての英語の研究は、言語文化的規範の流動性、適応能力の重要性、多言語の関連性を強調した多数の教育的提言を示してきた。しかし、非英語圏での留学は、参加者のこれらの分野におけるスキルを育成する上での教育的可能性にもかかわらず、ELFの文献において限定的な扱いを受けてきた。そこで、本研究はタイの日本人交換留学生との計10回のインタビューを分析し、英語に対する意識的な変化を考察する。分析の結果、周囲の英語話者の英語及び、留学生自身の言語使用に対する態度の明確な変化が明らかになった。具体的には、留学当初はネイティブによる英語を賞賛の対象と見なしていたが、徐々にネイティブによる英語に固執することを止め、英語を実用的な道具として考えるようになった。多様な対話者に対応する上で単一普遍の基準では不十分であるため、このような態度の変化はELF使用者にとって非常に重要であると考えられる。

It is now considered a matter of fact that English frequently plays a key role in intercultural encounters beyond national borders. As Crystal (2008) conservatively estimated, there were as many as two billion users of English conventionally referred to as nonnative speakers. Given that this figure greatly outnumbers that of native speakers, scholars have questioned the viability of the dichotomous relationship between native and nonnative in English language teaching (ELT) and advanced an alternative framework—English as a lingua franca (ELF; Jenkins, 2000, 2002; Seidlhofer 2001, 2004). This newer framework considers the language user's competence in its own right and regards deviation from native-speaker norms as difference, such that it does not automatically reduce communicative effectiveness (Jenkins, Cogo, & Dewey, 2011).

Over the years, ELF scholars have offered a number of pedagogical recommendations based on empirical findings. Earlier work revolved primarily around the common grammatical features that were supposed to ensure mutual intelligibility (Jenkins, 2000, 2002), but recent publications emphasize the negotiability of linguistic and cultural norms, the centrality of adaptive skills, and the relevance of multilingualism (Baker, 2015; Dewey, 2012; Jenkins, 2015; Seidlhofer, 2011). Despite their apparent educational potential in cultivating participants' skills in these areas, study abroad programs in expanding circle countries have received limited attention to date in the ELF literature, with the notable exception of a few studies (Dervin, 2013; Kalocsai, 2014; Smit, 2010). Because study abroad constitutes a key subfield within ELT, more studies in "ELF-resourced communities" where ELF is used as the primary communicative medium of choice (Kalocsai, 2014, p. 5) are needed to understand students' lives and learning.

A crucial first step toward developing ELF competence is to recognize the unprecedented global currency of English in today's world. Given that shared norms can hardly be assumed in translocal ELF interactions, naïve adherence to a single variety can be counterproductive in developing competence as a multilingual user of ELF capable of dealing with diverse and unpredictable interlocutors (Canagarajah, 2013). Moreover, *native-speakerism* (Holliday, 2006) is prevalent among learners and teachers of English,

particularly when deciding where to practice and learn English abroad. For these reasons, attitudinal readiness and transformation arguably constitute a prerequisite for success in study abroad in ELF-resourced communities (see Jenkins, 2007, for an extensive treatment of ELF speakers' attitudes). The present study is an attempt to offer empirical insight into this important issue. I longitudinally investigated a Japanese exchange student's changing perceptions of English(es) during her yearlong sojourn in Thailand through 10 semi-structured interviews. In the next section, I introduce the participant, study abroad program, and data collection procedures to contextualize the analysis. I then trace her attitudinal transformation through interview excerpts. Finally, I conclude by discussing limitations and future directions for research.

The Study

Participant

The participant in the study was Miho (pseudonym), who was a Japanese college sophomore (19 years old) majoring in English education. At the time of the study, she was studying at a public university in Bangkok as an international exchange student. She had never lived overseas for an extended period of time prior to her yearlong sojourn in Bangkok. Her English proficiency at the onset can be characterized as intermediate, as reflected in her TOEFL IPâ score of 420. I am an alumnus of Miho's university department in Japan, which enforces an English-only policy. As a result of our relationship, we usually communicated in English during interviews and otherwise. However, we were *not* institutionally required to use English because we were never enrolled at the same time. Miho was one of the two students from her university to study in Thailand during the period of data collection. Both of them initially agreed to voluntarily participate in the study when I asked them in person in June; however, the other student withdrew in December due to his busy schedule.

The study abroad program in Thailand operates between August and May annually. The program is designed for international students irrespective of L1 and is composed of regular college-level courses taught in English (as distinct from ESL courses) on various topics related to Thailand. Regardless of the program's focus, Miho chose to study there primarily because she wanted to use and improve her English in an international environment. Miho was proactive in making new friends, and her friendship network developed rapidly and extensively over the year. From day one, she made a number of friends and engaged in various activities both domestically and internationally. The nationalities of her friends in Thailand included, but were not limited to, Thai, American, French, Danish, Australian, Korean, and Chinese.

Data

The data for this study comprise Miho's interview responses. I conducted 10 semistructured interviews via Skype™, once a month between July and the following April, with a final post-study-abroad interview in October. The exact dates of the interviews were decided based on Miho's availability. The average length was approximately 60 minutes. Interview questions were designed to explore her experience of socialization, language use, and learning (see Appendix). Probing questions were also asked to delve into details. Because my research interest lies in flexible multilingual practices, I deliberatively opted to not specify the interview language. However, we used English predominantly in most interviews as explained in the previous paragraph. The only times Miho used Japanese were when there were others around her whom she did not want to be overheard by. I coded the interview responses to discern recurring themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In this paper, I limit my discussion to Miho's transforming orientations to English because of the importance of attitudinal change briefly touched on above, as well as space limitations. Other key themes omitted from the study relate to the groups of people she spent time with, types of activities she engaged in with them, difficulties in communication with different groups of people, self-perceived learning outcomes, and use and learning of the Thai language. Most of these themes are of relevance to contemporary research on study abroad, which focuses on producing qualitative understandings of what exactly study abroad participants do during their sojourns and with whom (Coleman, 2013; Kinginger, 2009), rather than unproblematically correlating participation in study abroad with linguistic gains. These themes will be reported in future publications focused specifically on study abroad.

Analysis and Discussion

Initial Orientations to English: Good English Speakers vs. Nonnative Speakers

Because it was the only shared language among the study abroad participants, Miho used English predominantly in her day-to-day communication. Using her own words, especially from the first few months, it was possible to loosely categorize English speakers into two groups: *good speakers* and *nonnative speakers*. The majority of the good speakers came from America, England, and Australia and spoke English as their L1. From Miho's perspective, they spoke English fast with a *native accent*. Importantly, one did not have to be from these so-called "English-speaking countries" to belong to the category of good English speakers. For instance, Miho described a Danish student's English as follows: "Denmark boy is very good at speak English, so I couldn't understand" (September). Her

remark indicates that a good English speaker would speak the kind of English that Miho could not understand, as the two clauses are linked by the causation marker *so*. It also implies that Miho regarded herself as at fault when there were problems in communication with these good speakers.

In contrast, Miho found it easier to communicate with nonnative speakers regardless of their nationalities, although she did not clearly discuss the potential reasons why. Consider the following excerpt (M is Miho; D is Daisuke [my name]):

D: How about other international students? How do you talk with them?

M: Ah, except U.S. students? Native English speakers?

D: Uh huh.

M: It's easier.

D: Why?

M: Because somehow their English is easy to understand to me.
(few minutes omitted)

M: Un, I can, I can understand their English.

D: You can understand their English. Europeans and who else?

M: And, Korean, students. (August)

Similarly, Miho explained in a later interview that nonnative speakers' English was easier to understand. Consider the following excerpt:

D: How about the non-American students?

M: Uhm, their English is easier to understand.

D: Yeah? Why.

M: Because they use basic English. I think.

D: Uh huh,

M: They don't use slang,

D: Uh huh,

M: They don't use- They don't speak complicated way. (November)

In addition to the rate of speech, this short excerpt reveals that the kind of English nonnative students spoke (i.e., *basic English*) was qualitatively different from that of their American, native English-speaking counterparts. One characteristic of basic English, as Miho described it, was the absence of slang. This point resonates with existing research on ELF that suggests that "unilateral idiomaticity" (Seidlhofer, 2001, p. 16) can create problems because idiomatic expressions and slang are not always shared among ELF speakers from diverse backgrounds.

The preceding analysis has highlighted Miho's perceptions of her interlocutors' English(es). She portrayed good speakers' English as difficult owing to their rate of speech, use of slang, and lack of accommodativeness, and nonnative English as basic and easier to understand. Miho also recounted the ways in which her English was received by her interlocutors. Again, Miho put forward a dichotomy between native (American) and nonnative (non-American) students:

D: So before, you were saying it's easier to communicate with non-American speakers. Can you tell me something about that?

M: I still- I feel easy to speak with nonnative because I don't really care about my English pronunciation, because they understand. But if I'm speaking always native friends, if my pronunciation is not so good, they don't understand at all. So I have to care about my pronunciation or my grammar when I'm speaking with native speakers. (December)

In this excerpt, Miho compares the differences she perceived between native and nonnative speakers. In terms of pronunciation, she found it easier to communicate with nonnative speakers because they tended to understand her English without adjustments. On the other hand, the native English-speaking friends "don't understand at all" if Miho spoke in the way she normally did. Consequently, she had to take extra care to adjust her English to that of her native English-speaking friends. It is notable that she became increasingly cognizant of the different phonological norms and capable of switching between them depending on the interlocutor. In contrast to Miho's developing linguistic awareness, the excerpts presented so far suggest that her native English-speaking friends were generally not willing to accommodate different grammatical and phonological norms; instead, they seem to have imposed their own norms on others.

Unlike in ESL programs, most of the people around Miho (whether good speakers or nonnative speakers) seem not to have been concerned about Miho's learning of English.

Rather, English was simply a tool for communication within this ELF-resourced community. That being said, there were some good speakers who were more accommodating than others and went the extra mile to mediate Miho's understanding and learning. Emma, a female student from Florida who had lived in Thailand for a few years, and Liz, a Mexican student who had grown up in California, constitute a good case in point:

M: American people will speak too fast to each other. So I can't- I can't- I can't hear.
D: Okay. It's too fast?
M: It's still fast. But, Liz and Emma is- Emma can speak slowly for me. So I think I can understand their English.
D: Huh, so, it's only the speed that is the problem?
M: Uh, speed and they worry about me.
D: Okay, they worry about you?
M: Yeah, because I can't speak English so fast. (November)

Although the particulars of interactions are not available for analysis, it appears that Emma and Liz were more accommodating than others. In addition to their tendency to "speak slowly" and "worry about me" recounted in the excerpt, Miho also mentioned other means by which these two individuals accommodated her English, such as word-level paraphrasing, sentence-level reformulation, and explicit comprehension checks (e.g., "Do you understand what I mean?"). In the same interview, Miho ascribed their accommodating dispositions to the fact that they were both fluent speakers of an L2. Emma had studied in Thailand since she was a high school student. Liz had learned English as an L2 after moving to the United States as a child.

Changing Orientations to English

So far, I have discussed Miho's perception of her peers' English(es) and experience of language use. Though Miho initially regarded good speakers of English (i.e., those L1 and L2 speakers who speak English fast with a native accent) as an object of admiration, she developed a more critical stance toward good speakers over the year, particularly in the second semester. The excerpt below illustrates her evolving stance:

(Describing good speakers' English)
M: なんやろ、え、なんか無駄に難しい。
nanyaro, e, nanka mudani muzukashii.
(Well, they are wastefully difficult.)
D: 無駄に難しい?
mudani muzukashii?
(Wastefully difficult?)
M: そう、もっと簡単にできるやんって思う。
soo, motto kantan'ni dekiruyantte omou.
(Yeah, I think they could make things much easier.)
D: Right.

In describing good speakers' English, Miho used a word with negative connotations—*mudani* (wastefully)—which contrasts with the ways she talked about them in the previous semester. In response to my request for clarification, she went on to suggest that they were able to make their English much easier to understand. In other words, the classification of native speakers as good speakers was no longer viable for Miho. Instead of uncritical admiration for native English, she was apparently developing a more pragmatic orientation to English. This orientation became particularly pronounced in the final interview after her return to Japan:

M: So I don't- I realized I don't like English. But if I cannot speak English, I cannot communicate with other people. So that's why I use English.
(Several lines omitted)
M: I still want to improve my English more. But I don't wanna be English expert.
D: Right.
M: That's not my dream.
(Several lines omitted)
D: So that's something that's changed, right? Compared to when you went to Thailand.
M: Yeah it changed. I like English before I go to exchange. But I realized I don't like English. I just like communicate with people and study new things, and know about world. (poststudy-abroad interview)

This excerpt vividly illustrates Miho's changing orientations to English. Whereas she used to strive to speak like native speakers of English, here she no longer regarded them as objects of admiration. Rather, she celebrated the utilitarian side of English (as a lingua franca) that allowed her to "communicate with people," "study new things," and "know about the world," which parallels House's (2003) distinction between language for identification and language for communication.

It is important to emphasize that developing a utilitarian orientation does not mean that Miho was downplaying native speakers and their norms. Instead, she was developing a more egalitarian mindset and strategies to deal with them on equal terms. These strategies appear to have been enabled by a utilitarian orientation to language. With this orientation, she was no longer hesitant to claim her legitimacy as a ratified participant in interactions. Consider the excerpt below from the final interview:

D: You were saying how American students talk too fast and *tatakitsubusu* (smash and destroy) your turns to talk or something like that.

M: Yeah.

D: How did that change or not change?

M: Uhm, they speak fast but- but now I know that when I want to say my opinion, I just can say like wait or sorry or something like that. So now I can say my feelings to them. (post-study-abroad interview)

In response to my question that refers back to a comment Miho made in a previous interview, Miho explained that she felt more comfortable about asking native speakers to slow down or repeat their utterances by saying "wait" or "sorry" when they spoke fast. The excerpt suggests that these overt strategies allowed her to better communicate her "feelings to them," which stands in stark contrast to how she used to let native speakers *tatakitsubusu* (smash and destroy) her turns to speak in the previous semester.

Discussion and Conclusion

Although ELF scholarship has produced a plethora of pedagogical recommendations, study abroad contexts have rarely been considered, with a few exceptions (e.g., Dervin, 2013; Kalocsai, 2014; Smit, 2010). Moreover, on the practice level, *native-speakerism* (Holliday, 2006) is quite prevalent among learners and teachers of English. Nonetheless, because the use of ELF is pragmatically motivated and intertwined with multilingualism, there is little doubt that study abroad programs in expanding circle countries hold great educational potential in cultivating participants' skills to negotiate English with diverse interlocutors. In a preliminary attempt to explore this important area of research, this study has investigated how a student's perception of English evolved during her yearlong sojourn. The analysis has revealed a clear transformation in Miho's attitudes to her peers' English(es) and to her own language use. Although she initially regarded native English (or good English) as an object of admiration, she gradually came to perceive it as wastefully difficult as a result of interactions with her L1 and L2 English-speaking peers. In contrast, she recurrently characterized other L2 speakers' English as easier to understand, alluding to some qualities that they might share in common. Moreover, corresponding with the growing critical stance to what was once considered good English, she came to view English in utilitarian terms, such that she no longer considered it as a target for assimilation. Arguably, such an attitudinal change is critical to becoming a competent user of ELF in the context of contemporary globalization because no single standard variety (e.g., American English) can be sufficient for flexibly dealing with linguistically and culturally diverse interlocutors (Canagarajah, 2013; Jenkins, 2015).

The findings of the study point to some potential avenues for future research. Given that the present study was based entirely on interview responses, future studies should incorporate multiple sources of data for triangulation purposes. For example, collecting video recordings of naturally occurring interactions and subjecting them to meticulous examination using such methods as conversation analysis would be useful in further investigating participants' language use and learning outcomes beyond self-reports and norm-referenced assessments. In fact, in a follow-up study with different Japanese students in Thailand, I have collected interactional recordings and produced field notes in addition to interviews to address the limitation of relying on a single source of data. Findings of this follow-up study will be reported in future publications. Another point regarding data is that although this study has provided rich, longitudinal accounts of Miho's experience in Thailand, a larger number of participants may be needed to draw generalizable conclusions. Last but not least, one particularly innovative line of future research stemming from the present study may concern the place of native speakers in ELF interaction who, according to Miho, tend to be less willing to negotiate their norms. As suggested by several scholars (Canagarajah, 2013; Kalocsai, 2014; Seidlhofer, 2011), this tendency can place native speakers at a disadvantage in translocal interactions. Although ELF scholarship theoretically recognizes that native speakers can (and do) take part in ELF interaction (Seidlhofer, 2009), they are severely underrepresented in the empirical literature to date. Thus, it may prove productive to include more native English speakers in empirical inquiries of ELF interaction.

Bio Data

Daisuke Kimura is a doctoral candidate in applied linguistics at Pennsylvania State University. Trained primarily in conversation analysis, he studies ELF interaction in various contexts and configurations, such as classroom and informal settings. His dissertation longitudinally explores the linguistic experience of international and local students at Thai universities with a particular focus on the interplay between ELF, multilingualism, and social relationships. <dxk968@psu.edu>

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Appendix

Interview Protocols

Note: Follow-up questions were also asked whenever deemed appropriate.

1. Some small talk (e.g., how are you?)
2. Who do you hang out with? Who are your friends?
   - Just one group or multiple groups?
3. What language(s) do you speak with them?
   - Tell me about your experiences communicating with them in any language you know.
     - Successful/ unsuccessful episodes?
     - How do you negotiate when you have troubles?
4. Do people adjust to your language ability? In what ways?

5. Which group do you feel most comfortable spending time with?
    - In what activities do you engage with your friends?
6. What do you think you have learned lately?
    - In terms of language?
    - Social skills?
    - Formally and informally?
7. How did you learn them?
    - Through what method?
    - Who did you learn from?
    - Did someone teach you or you self-learn?
8. Is there anything you want to share with me?