4 English as a *lingua franca* in East and Southeast Asia: Implications for Diplomatic and Intercultural Communication

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Summary

Ten nations make up the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)¹ and they officially adopted the ASEAN Charter in 2009. While Article 2 of the Charter urges ‘respect for the different languages of the peoples of ASEAN,’ Article 34 makes English the sole official working language. It states, simply, that, ‘the working language of ASEAN shall be English.’

In this chapter we shall consider the implications of the role of English as the sole working language of ASEAN for diplomacy and communication among the peoples of ASEAN. Using data drawn from the Asian Corpus of English (ACE), a million-word corpus of naturally occurring spoken English as used as a *lingua franca* between Asian multilinguals, we shall investigate how Asians use English to discuss topics of mutual interest and importance. After some reflections on excerpts of such naturally occurring utterances, suggestions for classroom application of the insight afforded by these are offered. The chapter will conclude with proposals for necessary communication skill sets for diplomats and other professionals who wish to communicate successfully through English with Asian multilinguals. These communication skills are likely to be

particularly important for people whose first language is a native variety of English, as they need to learn how English can be adapted to suit different cultures.

Introduction

In this chapter we shall look at how speakers of English as a *lingua franca* (ELF) use the language in naturally occurring contexts, including informal collegial interactions, discussions among consular officials and courtroom exchanges. We have chosen these different settings to show how context can determine language use, in particular the use, or non-use, of communicative strategies designed to ensure successful communication. We conclude with some recommendations for people who are likely to be engaged in ELF interactions in the future.

The data we use is all taken from the Asian Corpus of English (ACE), which we describe in a later section, and the participants are overwhelmingly Asian multilinguals for whom English is an additional language. These Asian multilinguals are nationals of one of the countries that comprise the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). There are also participants from Hong Kong. Before presenting and analyzing the data we begin by briefly summarizing recent research into ELF and explaining why we are using ELF data drawn from ACE and ASEAN.

Recent Research into ELF

In discussing ELF 'we must be careful not to categorize ELF as a specific, and stable variety of English' (Kirkpatrick, 2012: 132). ELF is more usefully seen as describing a function of language rather than a specific variety of it. ELF is dynamic and ELF speakers are constantly negotiating meaning (Canagarajah, 2013). The increase in the use of ELF has led to a corresponding increase in interest in it, with the realization that ELF is now the international *lingua franca*. By way of illustration, some 1 billion Asian multilinguals currently use ELF; and it has been estimated that there are 400 million Chinese currently using or learning English (Bolton & Graddol, 2012). This number alone outstrips the total number of native speakers of English in today's world. Given the extent to which ELF is currently employed, it is crucial that it becomes a focus of linguistic research (Mauranen, 2006). Examples of research projects so far implemented include the Vienna Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE) collected and analyzed by Barbara Seidlhofer and her team at the University of Vienna (<https://www.univie.ac.at/voice/>). VOICE comprises a corpus of naturally occurring English as used as a *lingua franca* by speakers of English as an additional language. As Seidlhofer points out, it is essential that ELF is conceptualized as having been appropriated by non-native users 'who become acknowledged as agents in the processes of how that language spreads, develops, varies and changes' (2010: 362) rather than being 'owned' by native speakers of the language. She continues that ELF research seeks to uncover 'new rules of engagement' in intercultural encounters (2010: 364) and

that users of English in ELF contexts 'make use of their multifaceted plurilingual repertoires in a fashion motivated by communicative purpose and the interpersonal dynamics of the interaction' (2010: 363).

Inspired by VOICE, which is largely Europe-focused, Kirkpatrick and his team have compiled the Asian Corpus of English (ACE), comprising some 1 million words of naturally occurring English as used as a spoken *lingua franca*. The participants are overwhelmingly Asian multilinguals from the 10 nations of ASEAN along with nationals from China (including Hong Kong), Japan and Korea. Eight data collection teams from across East and Southeast Asia were responsible for collecting and transcribing the data. The corpus, comprising complete speech events covering a wide range of interactions, topics and settings, is freely accessible from the website (<http://corpus.jed.edu.hk/ace/>). The need for an Asian corpus of English as a *lingua franca* was stimulated by the signing in 2009 of the official Charter of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which made English the sole official working language of the group. The ASEAN group, which was originally founded in 1967 and comprised five founding member states, currently comprises 10 Southeast Asian nations. The countries of ASEAN are characterized by 'political, cultural and historical diversity' (Severino, 2005: 15), being host to more than 1000 languages. While the ASEAN Charter also seeks to encourage respect for the different cultures, languages and religions of the peoples of ASEAN (Kirkpatrick, 2010: 7), it is not clear how this respect is to be nurtured given the official status of English as the sole working language. As Friedrich and Gomes de Matos (2012) have pointed out, the recognized need for a *lingua franca* should not 'clash with the desire to build community and preserve local language and culture' (2012: 23). Ways of promoting English as the *lingua franca* of ASEAN while maintaining local languages will be proposed later in the chapter.

A major use of a *lingua franca* over thousands of years has been in diplomacy. A key task of all diplomats is to be able to use language(s) in ways that do not inflame, but which seek peaceful solutions to problems and disputes. In multilateral diplomacy where speakers of many different first languages are present, it is impractical to expect that all participants speak each other's languages. One solution is to use interpreters and translators, but this can be expensive: the annual translation and interpreting bill for the European Union is in excess of US\$ 1 billion. Another is to use a common language. Historically many languages have been used as diplomatic *lingua francas* from Aramaic and Persian through to Arabic, Malay and French (Ostler, 2010). Today, however, the most commonly used diplomatic *lingua franca* is English. ELF might seem an ideal conduit for diplomatic communication, given that previous research into the communicative strategies adopted by ELF speakers has indicated a common desire for cooperation to facilitate successful communication. However, as we shall later show, cooperation is not always the goal.

The editors of a review of recent trends in ELF research conclude that these trends 'evidence the supportive and cooperative nature of interactions in ELF where meaning negotiation takes place at different levels' (Archibald *et al.*, 2011: 3). House has spoken

of the 'solidarity of non-native ELF speakers' (2003: 569). Findings pointing to the cooperative nature of ELF interactions have also been reported by Firth (1996) and Meierkord (2012). Firth identified strategies such as the 'let it pass' principle, whereby speakers, instead of seeking immediate clarification when they did not understand what a speaker was saying, would let it pass, hoping, often correctly, that the meaning would become clear later. Meierkord's findings indicate that 'the conversations are characterized by their participants' desire to render the interactions normal and to achieve communicative success' (2012: 15). In a study of the communication strategies of Asian ELF speakers, Kirkpatrick (2010: 141) identified 15 communicative strategies adopted by ELF speakers to ensure successful communication. While some of these are likely to be common to all speakers in similar communicative situations, some may be specific to ELF interactions. For example, he noted a combination of 'speaker paraphrase' and 'participant prompting,' as in [Excerpt 1](#) below (2010: 136–7). (S1 is a Singaporean female, L1 is a Laotian female and M1 is a Burmese female.) The participants are all qualified English teachers attending a professional development course in Singapore. The Singaporean is asking the Laotian what sort of support the Laos government provides to poor students. The figures in square brackets indicate the number of times the Singaporean student paraphrases her original question in order to help the Lao listener understand it.

Excerpt 1

S1: ...do the children you know in er in your country those who come from very poor families are they given financial assistance?

L1: ehm

S1: are they in terms of money? [1]

L1: ehm

S1: I mean does the government support them? [2] OK is there like you know those children who are very poor and their parents cannot afford to send them to school? [3] Does the government actually given them assistance? [4]

M1: yeah, the government will assist. I think so your government will assist.
(two second silence)

S1: example, you know like buying uniform for them or textbooks or paying for their school fees? [5]

L1: I think they don't do like that yes, only the family and parents can afford

S1: can afford

L1: yes afford them er for example in the countryside some students cannot learn because it's hardly for them to go to school

In this example the Singaporean patiently paraphrases her question five times, without displaying irritation or impatience. After the fourth paraphrase, the Burmese

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Excerpt 1

- S1:** ...do the children you know in er in your country those who come from very poor families are they given financial assistance?
- L1:** ehm
- SI:** are they in terms of money? [1]
- L1:** ehm
- SI:** I mean does the government support them? [2] OK is there like you know those children who are very poor and their parents cannot afford to send them to school? [3] Does the government actually given them assistance? [4]
- M1:** yeah, the government will assist. I think so your government will assist.
(two second silence)
- SI:** example, you know like buying uniform for them or textbooks or paying for their school fees? [5]
- L1:** I think they don't do like that yes, only the family and parents can afford
- SI:** can afford
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In this example the Singaporean patiently paraphrases her question five times, without displaying irritation or impatience. After the fourth paraphrase, the Burmese

participant enters the conversation and offers a prompt – a possible answer, which she hopes will help the Laotian finally understand the original question. But when this clearly does not help – there is a two-second silence – the Singaporean paraphrases her question for the fifth time and the Laotian finally understands it. It is important to stress that the context here is itself supportive, given that all three participants are attending the same professional development course and are genuinely interested in the topic. Even though the Laotian participant's English proficiency is not as high as the other two participants, they treat each other as equals, as evidenced by the lack of a display of any irritation or impatience. The often cooperative and supportive nature of ELF talk is an important advantage for interactants with differing levels of proficiency.

That said, however, ELF talk may also reflect speakers' own cultural schemata as well as issues arising from variation in linguistic proficiency. In a study of speech practices of Chinese, Indian and Korean teaching assistants in the United States, Yule (1990) found that the more fluent Indian speakers, when providing street directions for the Chinese and Korean hearers to follow (as part of a guided task), assumed a 'speaker knows best' attitude, ascribing discrepancies or misunderstandings to their interlocutors' lack of proficiency. They assumed that the receiver was 'in some sense less competent than the sender since his opinions or descriptions are rarely given much attention' (1990: 57) and that this was the cause of their interactive difficulties. Consequently, they tended not to solve the set tasks successfully. However, when the less fluent Chinese and Korean speakers were in the dominant position of giving directions to the Indian participants, the tasks were completed more successfully. Yule concluded that giving fluent speakers experience in less dominant roles within a dyad 'may turn out to be a much more effective lesson for students in developing their communication skills than simply allowing them to practice their fluency by giving presentations or speeches when they are in complete control of the information process' (1990: 61). This would seem to offer excellent advice for the training of those engaged in *lingua franca* communication. Indeed, the ACE data reveal a similar phenomenon: the Singaporean speaker in [Excerpt 1](#) demonstrates great sensitivity in dealing with her less proficient interactant, presumably as she sees herself as an equal in the discussion with a genuine interest in the opinions and knowledge of the other participants. This need for fluent speakers of English to be trained by assuming the less dominant roles in interactions may be of particular importance to 'native speakers' whose first language is English: studies conducted in Hong Kong showed that local employees had the most communicative difficulties 'when they needed to interact with inner circle speakers of English as a first language' (Nickerson, 2010: 511).

The data collected in ACE provide an excellent source of teaching materials for those who need to engage in negotiations and discussions using English as a *lingua franca*. For example, one could display the transcript of [Excerpt 1](#) to the students utterance by utterance, first giving them the opportunity to suggest what responses they might have made had they been in the Singaporean speaker's position. The students' suggestions and responses can then be compared with the Singaporean's actual responses. The teacher could also point out that the Laotian interactant was clearly having trouble

understanding the Singaporean's question and elicit students' suggestions about how the other participant in the interaction could help to resolve the issue. In this way the teacher could elicit or introduce the strategy of 'participant paraphrase,' as practiced by the speaker from Myanmar. Role play based on similar contexts could also be developed with students being required to play both the role of the more fluent participant as well as the less fluent participant and evaluating how the different roles influenced their experience of the interaction. They could also list the strategies they adopted and evaluate their relative success. In later sections we provide further practical suggestions for facilitators of English for diplomatic purposes to help their students develop competencies for working in English as a *lingua franca*.

The research indicating that ELF speakers cooperatively strive for communicative success has largely been based on interactions where the stakes are not high. As Yule noted above, however, in task-based exchanges (particularly high-stakes ones) there can be a tendency for the more proficient speakers to blame the less proficient ones for problems encountered in completing the task. Recent research also illustrates that ELF communication is not always smooth and communicatively successful. For example, Jenks' study on ELF talk in online chat rooms led him to conclude 'ELF interactants are not inherently mutually supportive and do not always seek to build consensus; on the contrary, they highlight problems or troubles in communication through laughter, joking, and ridicule' (Jenks, 2012: 386). Walkinshaw and Kirkpatrick (2014) identify the use of mock impoliteness and contradictions or counterclaims that appear to threaten directly the face of the relevant interactant(s). Similar confrontational strategies are illustrated in some of the data we discuss below.

Ensuring successful communication when the speakers come from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds is no easy task. 'ELF cannot be seen as a culturally reduced or identity neutral medium of communication' (Archibald *et al.*, 2011: 4). It has long been established that speakers may transfer their own pragmatic and cultural norms from their first language when speaking in a second language and that these may be interpreted against first language or first culture norms (Baker, 2011; Gumperz, 1982; Klimczak-Pawlak, 2014). For example, a person who transfers Chinese request-making norms when making requests in English, or who transfers patterns of Chinese argument when putting forward an opinion may be classified by native speakers of English as someone who 'beats around the bush' or who never gets to the point. This is because a common rhetorical strategy in Chinese is to provide reasons for a request before making it, much as supporting arguments are often presented before making the main point (Kirkpatrick, 1995; see Kirkpatrick & Xu, 2012: 125 ff. for several examples of this). In the 1970s, one of the authors (Kirkpatrick) conducted a study into the communication problems that were besetting what was then known as the Royal Hong Kong Police. At that time, the majority of the senior officers had been seconded from the United Kingdom and the junior ranks were mostly Cantonese. Few of the senior officers had experience of Chinese cultures or knew any Chinese languages. It became clear that a major problem in communication – aside from the obvious one of few expatriate officers being proficient in Chinese – was caused by the Chinese police transferring

Chinese rhetorical styles into their English; and that these rhetorical styles were being interpreted and evaluated by the senior officers as if they had been uttered by British speakers of English (see also Young, 1994). So, as indicated above, Chinese police wanting to make a request tended to preface their request with the reasons for it. A typical example occurred when a Chinese police constable requesting a period of leave began his request by saying that his mother was ill, that he had to take her to hospital and so forth. The English officer became irritated, wanting the constable to come to the point and make his request explicitly, e.g. 'Can I have some leave on Thursday please sir?' Making a direct request in this way of a senior officer would have been extremely face-threatening to the Chinese, not least because the direct request could have been met with a direct 'No'. Taking a more indirect approach by prefacing the request with reasons is a far less threatening strategy, respecting, as it does, the relative status of the parties involved. If the request is to be refused for any reason the senior officer can indicate this before the request is actually made by giving a reason why no leave is being granted at the moment. This allows the requestor, the police constable in this case, to withdraw from the interaction with his face intact. Conversely, if the leave can be granted, the senior officer can grant the request before it is explicitly made, thereby enjoying the face-boost of appearing thoughtful and sensitive. Consequently, materials and role plays were developed to show how Chinese rhetorical norms could be transferred into the English of the Chinese police, and how these norms could be interpreted and responded to in this type of cross-cultural communication.

Thus, when English is used as a tool for diplomacy and conflict resolution, it is imperative that interactants of all linguistic origins are conscious of how English is used as a *lingua franca*. Specifically, interactants need to be sensitive to the fact that speakers' own cultures may be reflected in the way they use English and the impact this has on utterance production and rhetoric, as well as rights and obligations vis-à-vis turn-taking, topic control and possession of the floor. As mentioned previously, it is also worth remembering that the majority of users of English in today's world are non-native speakers using English as a *lingua franca*. Multilinguals in Asia have shaped English to reflect their own cultures, such that it is now possible to talk about the distinct Englishes of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and the Philippines, whose speakers have taken ownership of English, shaping and adapting it to suit their own values and needs. By contrast, 'native' English speakers are a minority, so the onus is on them to become familiar with how English has been adapted by other groups, how Englishes encode the cultural values of their speakers and the implications of this for intercultural communication. Part of this consciousness-raising is awareness that so-called 'native' varieties of English can be difficult for speakers of other varieties to comprehend, not due to linguistic deficit but to issues of speaker idiomaticity and intelligibility (Seidlhofer, 2009). Englishes spoken by educated speakers from Hong Kong and Singapore are actually more internationally intelligible (e.g. Kirkpatrick *et al.*, 2008; Smith & Rafiqzad, 1979). A further point is that ELF can be a channel of revolution and resistance to the 'linguistic imperialism' propounded by Phillipson (1992). To this end, Whitehead (2011) argues, it is essential that the ELT profession

develops accountable professional standards. The profession also needs to ensure that its practitioners receive training in the use of ELF, some suggestions for which have already been made and to which we return in the implications section of the chapter. We now provide a brief overview of the official role of English in ASEAN and the ASEAN or Asian way.

ELF in ASEAN and the Asian Way

ASEAN aims to promote the so-called ASEAN way, which can be encapsulated in two Malay concepts, *musyawarah* (dialogue) and *muafakat* (consensus) (Curley & Thomas, 2007). The ASEAN way underlines the importance of consensus building and group consultation, not only between the respective nations but also between governments and the private sector (Wu, 2011). Wu notes that 'While ASEAN as a collective may know what it wants, these consultations help the group ascertain how to get there.' Of course, consensus building is crucial to all diplomatic activity. However, as we show below, it seems to have particular significance for the ASEAN way.

Given that, as we noted above, ASEAN represents rich linguistic, cultural and religious diversity, maintaining dialogue and reaching consensus is likely to provide challenges. This is a major reason for the drawing up of the ASEAN Charter, which aims to define 'a more cohesive structure with specific rules of engagement for member countries,' including 'enforceable obligations' (Kumar & Siddique, 2008: 75). At the same time, ASEAN's slogan is 'unity in diversity,' a popular catchphrase among diverse nations or communities. For example, it is also the slogan for Indonesia, and the European Union. Quite how the adoption of English as the sole working language will promote unity in diversity is not made clear, since the promotion of a single language (as is the case with English in ASEAN and with the promotion of Bahasa Indonesia as the national *lingua franca* of Indonesia) usually serves to undermine linguistic and cultural diversity.

While seeking consensus and facilitating dialogue are key aims in all diplomacy, diplomatic discussions can be tense and high stakes are often involved. As a minister in the Cambodian government reported when discussing the role of English in ASEAN (Clayton, 2006: 230–231):

If we don't know English, how can we participate? We need to know English so that we can defend our interests. You know, ASEAN is not some kissy-kissy brotherhood. The countries are fiercely competitive, and a strong knowledge of English will help us protect our interests.

In such contexts, while seeking consensus and facilitating dialogue remain important aims, discussions may be hard-edged and passionate. The patience shown by the Singaporean speaker in (1) above is unlikely to be replicated when the stakes are high and participants are trying to win arguments or, at the very least, ensure that their arguments and points of view are understood, if not accepted. The Cambodian minister

cited above also understood that the role of English in ASEAN had little connection with a native speaking variety of English, saying, 'You know, when we use English we don't think about the United States or England. We only think about the need to communicate' (Clayton, 2006: 233).

In this section of the chapter we have briefly reviewed recent research into ELF and shown ELF speakers need to develop a range of communicative strategies to ensure successful communication between speakers from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. It is thus important that those who engage in ELF communication are trained not to judge ELF speakers' against their own cultural norms, in order to avoid misleading stereotyping and serious misunderstandings. We have also reviewed research that shows that multilingual ELF users tend to be supportive in seeking a collegial and collaborative atmosphere in which successful communication is the goal, while warning that, when the stakes are high and individual or national interests are at stake, discussions are likely to become more hard-edged. We have also given a brief review of the role of English in ASEAN. In the next section of the chapter we illustrate the use of ELF in a variety of settings, employing data from the ACE corpus.

ELF use in ASEAN

We here explore how English is used as a *lingua franca* in ASEAN. In the first excerpts we attempt to identify concrete evidence in the ACE corpus for an ASEAN or Asian way. The participants in these excerpts are consular staff from Bruneian, Malaysian and Indonesian embassies who are undertaking a professional development course at the University of Brunei. They are discussing how they might handle complaints or problems connected with the issuing or non-issuing of visas. In these excerpts there are three participants. S4 is a Bruneian female, S5 a Malaysian male and S6 an Indonesian female.

In *Excerpt 2* below, the Bruneian female makes explicit reference to an Asian way. This is picked up by the Indonesian female who says, as an example of the Asian way, that she dislikes refusing requests. The notation conventions are provided in the appendix.

Excerpt 2

- S4: <soft> no problem </soft> SO that was about VISA as well you know=
S6: =yeah (1) <soft> visa (as) </soft>
S5: mhm: mhm
S6: but (1)
S4: but is THERE is there particular asian way to say it (.) <soft> what they want us to say </soft> hh e:r (.) <1> you go with </1>
S6: <1> THE THING is </1> I (.) I've never (.) like refuse any asian: (.) <soft> countries you know </soft> when they come to us to for visa (.) maybe other countries but not asians so far so (.) that's why when in case of nigerian yes i

(.) <2> once </2>

S4: <2> mhm </2>

This notion of an 'Asian way' is further developed in [Excerpt 3](#). It is worth noting that the 'Asian way' is also directly contrasted with 'western culture,' when the Malaysian male says 'they will totally follow the procedure'.

Excerpt 3

S4: =so that's that's asian </L1mal> lah </L1mal> you know =

S6: = yeah yeah =

S4: = <L1mal> ah </L1mal>

S5: <1> but sometimes i suspect (.) yeah </1>

S6: <1> we don't we don't be like </1> <2> it's it's nice </2>

S4: <2> <L1mal> ah </L1mal> </2>

S6: to refuse (.) you know =

S4: = yeah

S6: people when they come and ask you for a favor or something like that =

S4: = <3> and then </3>

S5: <3> th- </3>

S4: especially (.) you know <4> with phone calls </4> like that

S6: <4> yeah and <un> x </un> </4>

S6: <5> yeah especially if you know them </5>

S5: <5> i think i think in the western (.) </5> i think in the western culture they will (1) totally follow the (.)

S6: yeah

S5: the procedure right if (.) tomorrow means tomorrow if you cannot means cannot =

S4: = yeah

S6: <6> <soft> i don't know </soft> </6>

S5: <6> erm </6> but because we: you know being asian we want to: (.) we we don't like to hurt others

S6: yeah

S5: and er <7> @@@ </7>

S6: <7> @@@ </7> hh we like to be nice @@@@

[Excerpts 2](#) and [3](#) are interesting in that they illustrate that an 'Asian way' has real meaning for the participants and that they are conscious of a possible tension between

following the Asian way and strictly correct procedure. The excerpts show that achieving consensus is at the forefront of their thinking and influences their decisions and actions.

Crucially, the context for the excerpts above is collegial; the stakes are not high and the participants are discussing a topic of mutual interest. [Excerpt 4](#) is also taken from a context where the participants are working together toward a common goal. They are discussing the finer points of debating. S2 and S4 are Bruneian males, S5 is a Pakistani male, S6 is a Cambodian male and S7 is a Malaysian female. It is worth noting that, even though the Cambodian speaker (S6) says the least in this excerpt, his three contributions ('yeah, same place,' 'I mean it's you mean it's the you mean to interact face to face,' and 'caseline') are all picked up by other participants. We have underlined his contributions to make them easier to identify.

Excerpt 4

S2: =exactly

S5: and they (.) not facing each other (.) and you don't er (.) you are <1>not </1>

S2: <1>er</1> so: it's not in existence of (.) er what do you call that?

S4: it's like so (.) virtual interaction?

S7: but we can't say they're not at the same place or same time (.) sometimes they are at the same time=

S2: =yeah

S5: y-y-you usually not at the same place and same time @@@

S2: I mean (.) i-it is possible.

S4: =then

S2: so if it's possible it's still possible then w-w-we cannot include that (.) yeah

S6: yeah (.) same place

S4: then we just skip the (.) <5> same place at the same time </5>

S7: <5> <un> xx </un> the same </5> virtual mediums.

S4: yeah just just erm (.) focus on virtual interaction

S2: that's it

S4: that erm (.) which not include paralinguistic right?

S7: mhm (.) does not include paralinguistic

S2: so how would you write this, how would you say this.

S4: virtual interaction in FORM of linguistic.

S5: <soft>having the linguistic features</soft>

S4: and not paralinguistic @@@@ (18) okay.

S2: do we need to have a specific goal? (.) like erm (.) what is the interaction used

for like to create BONDS or (.) okay if it's to create BONDS then face to face interaction is obviously better right?

S4: yeah (.) we need to focus on that as well=

S7: =yeah

S6: i mean (.) it's er (.) y-y-you mean it's the (.) you mean to (.) interact f-face to face.

S2: okay so we have (.) definitions down? (.) what else (.) what else do we have

S4: we have some points as well

S6: caseline

S2: okay, so (.) let's think of a caseline. i already have mine, (1) you guys wanna come up with something?

These examples can all be used in the classroom to generate discussion into whether there really is an ASEAN way and, if so, in which contexts it is likely to be realized and in which contexts collegiality might be sacrificed in order to advance an interactional goal. Students could also be provided with a range of contexts and be asked to judge whether these are likely to be high stakes or low stakes and the implications of this for how the interaction develops. As will be illustrated in the next excerpts, in some contexts a desire for consensus and collegiality is discarded in favor of pressing home one's argument while rebutting those of interlocutors.

The final extracts from the ACE corpus come not from diplomacy but from the courtroom. We include these to show that the context influences the language used by ELF speakers, just as it influences the language of all speakers. The courtroom data provide examples of ELF speakers who, contrary to Firth's (1996) findings, do not let a matter pass in the hope all will become clear later. Direct, confrontational questioning and bald-on-record disagreement are common currency in these exchanges, where winning the argument supersedes the desire for interactional comity. The first courtroom excerpts are drawn from a dispute over the boundaries of a property. The participants are L1 speakers of Cantonese. The setting here determines the use of language, and the 'Asian way' is clearly not applicable to this context. In [Excerpt 5](#) below, S5 demands to know S2's point, employing a direct and confrontational line of questioning with few mitigating devices or softeners.

Excerpt 5

S2: that is the distance from the top of the retaining wall to the surface of the berm

S5: then what's your point?

S2: okay

S5: what's the point?

S2: now okay my point is with that figure in mind...

A few lines later S5 continues:

S5: sorry I can't catch your point

S2: okay

S5: really

S1: it is

S5: I can't catch your point if I project

So in the space of a few turns, S5 repeats four times that he cannot catch the point that S2 is trying to make. This represents a direct threat to S2's face. The next set of excerpts of courtroom data offer further examples of contradictions that threaten an interlocutor's face:

Excerpt 6

S3: yes I agree this therefore this portion was classified to the low 7355

S2: no I think maybe you have misunderstood my question what I'm saying is your answer to me earlier...

Excerpt 7

S2: but the boundary was here right

S3: yes

S2: so what makes you think that this portion would be used by the owner of 7355?

Excerpt 8

S2: would you agree with me that you have not taken into account the evolution history of the lot 7355?

S3: no I do not agree.

In [Excerpt 6](#), S2 interrupts S3's utterance to assert that S3 has misunderstood S2's question, and frames S3 as failing to fully comprehend the content of the exchange – a potential threat to S3's face as a competent actor in a professional milieu. S2 then reinforces the face-threat by pointedly prefacing his clarification with 'what I'm saying is,' implicitly reiterating his belief that S3 has not understood what S2 is saying. In [Excerpt 7](#), S2's use of 'so what makes you think' could be evaluated as questioning the validity of a point made earlier by S3. Again S3's face as a competent professional is threatened. And in [Excerpt 8](#), S3 counters by directly disagreeing with S2's assertion, without offering redress of any kind. In the next samples of courtroom dialogue we further illustrate how the situational context and the objectives of the exchange override any desire for cooperation or consensus.

Excerpt 9

S1: ...based on the plan and this photo the material was in fact part of the original approved=
 S2: =no=
 S1: =building structure
 S2: no it is not
 S1: it you
 S2: that is
 S1: are sure
 S2: of yes it is erm the er er erm (.) of the (.) part of the (.) canopy (.)
 S1: why (.) are you so sure? have you talked to the person (.) or company (.) who or which constructed this structure?
 S2: hm:
 S1: you didn't.
 S2: no
 S1: why were you so sure?
 S2: hm: (28)

In [Excerpt 9](#), the two participants disagree without regard for one another's face-needs. S1's assertion that 'the material was in fact part of the original approved building structure' is directly contradicted by S2, who says 'no it is not'. A few turns later S2 asserts that the material was part of the canopy rather than the original structure. S1's rejoinder 'why are you so sure' appears to undermine the quality of S2's statement, particularly as, not having received a satisfactory response, he repeats it in the following turn.

In sum, face-work and rapport management are not a priority in the courtroom exchanges outlined above. Indeed, undermining interlocutors' face appears to be a common practice, perhaps as a function of the interactional objectives in that milieu: to advance one's arguments while discrediting those of one's opponents. We therefore suggest that facilitators of diplomatic communication ensure their students understand the importance of situational/institutional context, relative power and status of the participants, and the potential influence of these on the type of linguistic and rhetorical forms adopted. Clearly, the default 'Asian Way' schema may be overruled by interactional factors, particularly when the stakes are high.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter we have shown that, while ELF speakers do tend to cooperate in their desire to ensure successful communication and, in so doing, focus on the message of the communication rather than the form (Archibald *et al.*, 2011), this does not mean that all

ELF communication is cooperative. The situational context and the interactional objectives determine the type of language employed. We illustrated this with extracts taken from the ACE corpus. We showed that the notion of an 'Asian way' appears valid, with the consular officials in *Excerpts 2* and *3* making explicit reference to this and contrasting it with the procedures adopted by 'western culture'. We demonstrated that, when engaged in a group task, the ELF speakers were cooperative and made efforts to comprehend the contributions of less proficient interactants. However, we then showed that when confrontation is expected (e.g. the courtroom case), then oppositional disagreements could be voiced with little regard for interlocutor face concerns or overall group rapport. These exchanges also illustrated that speakers focused on message rather than form; non-standard forms or mispronunciations did not disrupt the conversational flow or occasion any misunderstanding. Finally, the excerpts from courtroom exchanges also demonstrate how the setting and context determine language use: these exchanges were characterized by direct contradictions and disagreements, all threatening the recipients' face.

What lessons can be drawn from the examples that might aid successful communication in ELF interactions?

The first is that training in ELF communication is essential for all potential ELF users, including speakers of English as a first language. It is not enough to teach some ill-defined notion of English when the English will be required to secure conflict resolution between people of differing linguistic and cultural backgrounds. People will need to learn how ELF is used and the importance of focusing on the message being conveyed rather than on the linguistic form. At the same time, people will need training in recognizing how the cultural values and pragmatic norms of ELF speakers may be reflected in their use of English. They need training to avoid stereotyping ELF speakers by evaluating their use of English against their own cultural or linguistic norms and thus making inaccurate assumptions about the speaker's personality or intelligence. By the same token, they need to be aware that their own cultural values and pragmatic norms are not necessarily shared. What seems normal to them may seem inappropriate or even offensive to others. In short, people engaged in ELF communication need emotional intelligence and sensitivity to alternative ways of speaking and doing (Kirkpatrick & Sussex, 2012).

In the specific context of ASEAN, the promotion of English as the sole working language has provided further impetus for education systems and curricula to make English the first language, other than the national language, to be learned in schools. English is a compulsory subject in all the region's primary schools except Indonesia. This means that English, in the great majority of cases, has replaced local languages in the primary curriculum. The case for a '*lingua franca* approach' to the teaching of English in ASEAN has been proposed (Kirkpatrick, 2012) from which the following two principles are taken: (1) to ensure that the English curriculum is ASEAN- or Asian-

centric and incorporates knowledge of the cultures and religions of the countries of ASEAN; and (2) the teaching of English should be delayed until children have fluency and literacy in their mother tongue and the national language (these are often different languages in multilingual ASEAN). This would ensure children develop a sense of self-worth and confidence in their own cultures before being required to learn English. An ASEAN-centered English curriculum would then ensure they became familiar with the languages and cultures of the region.

Such measures might help ASEAN marry the apparently contradictory policies of making English the sole working language while ensuring respect for the many languages, cultures and religions of ASEAN. Citizens confident in the value of their own languages and cultures, knowledgeable about regional languages and cultures and who are trained as ELF speakers are more likely to be able to maintain dialogue and reach consensus in diplomacy and conflict resolution than those who have been taught that English is the language of native-speaking 'others' over which they have no ownership and whose too-early introduction to English has undermined their confidence in their own cultures and languages. At the same time, all who are required to negotiate using ELF need specific training in the use of ELF. This is particularly important for those who use English for diplomatic purposes in ASEAN's richly multicultural and linguistically diverse milieu, where the Englishes used by the Asian multilinguals concerned are likely to have been shaped by local languages, cultures, and values.

Note

- (1) The five founding member nations of ASEAN were Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam have since joined.

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Appendix

Notation Conventions

ACE has adopted the transcription conventions of VOICE in order to ensure researchers can easily compare the two corpora. Overlapping utterances are marked with numbered tags, e.g. <1>...</1>. Laughter is indicated through @@@, each symbol approximating a syllable. A short pause is indicated by a period flanked by brackets, e.g. (.) and a longer one by the length of the pause in seconds flanked by brackets, e.g. (2).