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Teasing in informal contexts in English as an Asian lingua franca

Trêu đùa trong các tình huống giao tiếp hàng ngày khi sử dụng tiếng Anh như một ngôn ngữ chung

DOI 10.1515/jelf-2016-0019

Abstract: This paper explores how speakers of English as a lingua franca (ELF) manage the interactional back-and-forth of teasing, a social action which, being fundamentally ambiguous, is open to interpretation by a target and/or other participants as aggressive in intent. The data reported here draw on the Asian Corpus of English (ACE), and describe some of the more typical teasing practices which occur among Asian ELF speakers in informal, non-task-focused contexts. More specifically, this research explores the interpersonal functions which teasing performs in ACE interactions; the teasing strategies commonly employed to serve these functions; and the responses of recipients to teases targeting them. The data show that teasing is a common practice in interaction among Asian ELF speakers, and is accomplished through a variety of strategies such as jocular mockery, jocular agreement with a target's negative self-assessment, jocular insult, and banter. Significantly, teasing in ACE appears to be essentially jocular rather than conveying veiled aggression; markers such as laughter, heightened vocal pitch and lexical exaggeration are commonly employed to signpost the non-serious nature of such utterances. Teases are also commonly received as jocular by recipients; there are no instances of offense being expressed by a tease recipient.

Keywords: Asian Corpus of English, English as a lingua franca, pragmatics, spoken interaction, teasing

Tóm tắt: Bài viết này tìm hiểu cách những người không cùng tiếng mẹ đẻ và nói tiếng Anh như một ngôn ngữ chung (ELF) trêu đùa lẫn nhau khi giao tiếp. Trêu đùa về cơ bản là một hành động giao tiếp xã hội mơ hồ về ý nghĩa, có thể làm người đối diện và/hoặc những người cùng tham gia cuộc nói chuyện diễn giải rằng người phát ngôn đang tỏ ra hiểu nhầm. Số liệu sử dụng ở nghiên cứu này được lấy

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từ Khối ngữ liệu tiếng Anh châu Á (ACE), và miêu tả một số cách trêu đùa phổ biến trong giao tiếp bằng tiếng Anh giữa các chủ thể là người châu Á trong các tình huống xã giao hàng ngày, không mang tính học tập hay công việc. Cụ thể hơn, nghiên cứu này khám phá các chức năng giao tiếp của hành động trêu đùa trong các tương tác thuộc khối ngữ liệu ACE; các chiến lược trêu đùa thường được sử dụng để thể hiện các chức năng này; và cách người đối thoại phản ứng lại những lời trêu đùa nhắm vào họ. Số liệu cho thấy trêu đùa là một hiện tượng phổ biến trong tương tác bằng tiếng Anh giữa người châu Á; hành động này được thực hiện thông qua một loạt các chiến lược như chế nhạo mang tính đùa giỡn, trêu đùa có sự đồng thuận khi người bị trêu chọc tự nhận xét tiêu cực về bản thân, sỉ nhục mang tính đùa giỡn, và nói đùa vui. Đáng chú ý là các hành động trêu đùa trong khối ngữ liệu ACE dường như mang bản chất hài hước hơn là ngầm thể hiện sự hiếu thắng. Các dấu hiệu như cười, cao giọng, và các từ ngữ cường điệu thường được sử dụng để thể hiện tính chất không nghiêm trọng của những lời trêu đùa. Ngoài ra đối tượng giao tiếp thường đón nhận lời nói trêu đùa một cách hài hước; không có trường hợp nào người bị trêu cảm thấy bị xúc phạm.

Từ khoá: Khối ngữ, liệu tiếng Anh châu Á, tiếng Anh như, một ngữ, chung, ngữ, dụng học, tương tác bằng lời nói, trêu đùa

1 Introduction

In this paper I want to explore how speakers of English as a lingua franca (ELF) manage the interactional back-and-forth of teasing, a social action which can perform a solidarity-boosting function and yet, being fundamentally ambiguous, is open to interpretation by a target and/or other participants as aggressive in intent. The data reported here are drawn from the Asian Corpus of English (ACE), and will describe some of the more typical teasing practices (productive and interpretive) which are found to occur among Asian ELF speakers in informal, non-task-focused contexts. The questions guiding this research are as follows: What interpersonal functions does teasing perform among speakers of English as a lingua franca in the Asian Corpus of English (ACE)? What teasing strategies are commonly employed to serve these functions? How do recipients evaluate/respond to teases targeting them?

Before examining the data, I will first outline some phenomena which are relevant to the analysis: teasing will be defined, and pertinent theories of its interpersonal functions will be reviewed. The literature conceptualising ELF will be reviewed as well, so as to place the teasing practices which emerge from the ACE data within a situated communicative and pragmatic context.

2 Defining teasing

A functional definition of teasing is in order. A teasing utterance expresses a potentially face-threatening (Brown and Levinson 1987) statement while simultaneously signalling its intention as non-serious. The core elements are “an intentional *provocation* accompanied by playful *off-record markers* that together comment on something relevant to the target” (Keltner et al. 2001: 235, emphasis mine). The first element, provocation, is intentionally directed at some (often undesirable) act or attribute of the recipient. It normally refers to (i) something about the target; (ii) the relationship between the teaser and the target; or (iii) some object of interest to the target. The second element is the occurrence of linguistic off-record markers such as laughter, sudden pitch changes, or exaggeration (Haugh 2010; Lampert and Ervin-Tripp 2006) which signal the tease’s non-serious intent. (Upcoming sections will set these markers out in more detail.) What is problematic about teasing, though, is the inherent ambiguity of the provocation element, off-record markers notwithstanding. In Gricean terms, teasing flouts the Maxim of Manner (i. e. that ambiguity be avoided) (Grice et al. 1975), forcing the recipient to infer whether the tease is intended by the speaker as jocular or whether a more insidious meaning is implied.

So far, few studies have explored how teasing is enacted in different languages or cultures (Haugh forthcoming) or in a lingua franca context, and the question of whether and to what extent teasing practices (both productive and interpretive) are linguistically and/or culturally bounded remains open. Despite attempts to formulate models of teasing (e. g. Alberts et al. 1996; DiCioccio 2010; Kowalski 2004), no viable theory of teasing across groups, relational networks and societies has so far emerged. The principal reason is that scholars have only a limited understanding of how teasing practices are enacted and interpreted in different languages and cultures; indeed, such definitions as currently exist tend to be analysed within a culture-bound (Anglo-English) framework, potentially distorting the culturally imbued nature of teasing (Haugh forthcoming). A great deal of work is needed to describe and analyse the various teasing practices that may exist, particularly in lingua franca exchanges.

Let me now recapitulate the key literature outlining teasing as a social action, before outlining a useful framework for categorising teasing exchanges. Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997) claim that teasing and joking about others has primarily a relational function; that is, relationships are affirmed and reaffirmed through being verbally “displayed” in interaction, thereby foregrounding the relationship between the participants and engendering a sense of in-group

membership. Boxer and Cortés-Conde conceptualise teasing as occurring on a continuum, starting with bonding at one end, followed by what they metaphorically label nipping at the centre and biting at the opposite end. The bonding end of the continuum encompasses teasing that is entirely playful and jocular in nature, promoting solidarity among the producer, the target and the audience (if present). (Boxer and Cortés-Conde also discuss *joking that bonds*, i. e. uniting members of an in-group against an absent other who is the butt of the joke. A bonding tease differs, however, in that all interactants are co-present.) Conversely, nipping and biting are teases that are hearable as masking a malicious intent. Nipping is differentiated from biting through the existence of a meta-message such as a disclaimer, exaggerated intonation, or laughter which alerts the target and other participants to the tease's jocular nature. A tease which lacks any such contextualisation cues may bite, i. e. be evaluated by the recipient as concealing an aggressive intent.

3 English as a lingua franca

Having defined teasing and outlined a useful framework for analysing its (intended and/or perceived) functions, I now turn to the mode of communication in which the social action of teasing is to be explored: English as a lingua franca (ELF). ELF refers to English used as a vehicle for communication between interlocutors who do not share a first language. As English has become the premier language for international communication (Crystal 2003; Graddol 2006), and as speakers of English as an additional language now far outnumber first language speakers, lingua franca communication has become one of the most common uses of English worldwide, earning ELF legitimacy as a branch of English in its own right (Jenkins 2007). A key characteristic of ELF is that it is not normally conceptualised as a language variety but rather as a vehicular language: an endonormative mode of communication where interactional norms are jointly negotiated on a *pro tempore* basis for each interaction (Seidlhofer 2011). As such, interaction in ELF is much less culturally underpinned than interaction among L1 speakers who share a culture. Interactants may represent a range of cultures (with potentially diverging sociopragmatic norms of appropriateness, and pragmatolinguistic realisations for producing teases and responding to them) rather than having one shared culture.

As this research examines pragmatic (rather than lexical, syntactic or phonological) characteristics of ELF, my focus henceforth will be on pragmatic phenomena associated with ELF, as identified through research.

The first phenomenon is interactants' apparent suspension of their culturally and linguistically founded interactional norms in favour of ad hoc norms – co-constructed anew in each individual exchange – which are negotiated depending on participants' repertoires and the purpose/s of the interaction (Meierkord 2000; Seidlhofer 2004). Meierkord (2000) attributed this suspension of judgment to ELF speakers' shared status as second language users, which reduced their self-consciousness about inadvertently failing to communicate meaning or transgressing interactional norms. This shared status also meant that the syntactic, lexical or pragmatic irregularities of others would often be accepted without judgment as to their correctness or appropriateness. In teasing exchanges, this characteristic takes the form of a suspension of judgment by the recipient about the intentionality of the tease (i.e. whether the producer intended it to be jocular or whether a more sinister, "biting" intent existed).

Secondly, and in a similar vein, Lesznyák (2002) identified a high degree of tolerance among ELF users toward unexpected linguistic behaviour, coupled with a tendency to ignore potentially conflictual utterances (cf. House 2002). That phenomenon, in turn, recalls Firth's (1996) "let it pass" principle, wherein interactants who do not comprehend an interlocutor's utterance may withhold their response or judgment until the intended meaning becomes clear. The principle applies readily to pragmatic infelicities such as breaching of any interactional norms (pre-existing or *pro tempore*) that are in play in an ELF exchange.

The third characteristic which I will outline here is House's (2013a) assertion that ELF speakers consistently demonstrate solidarity and consensus, despite their differing linguistic and cultural backgrounds. One aspect of this apparent solidarity orientation is that when some action occurs which is construable as threatening to interactional rapport, the participants promptly move to normalise the conversation so that it can continue along its prior trajectory (Walkinshaw and Kirkpatrick 2014). Actually, a clarification is needed here: recent research into situated, task-focused exchanges such as business meetings (Bjørge 2012; Jenks 2012; Pullin Stark 2010), courtrooms (Kirkpatrick et al. 2016), or interactions between immigration officials and asylum seekers (Guido 2012) suggests that solidarity orientation is context-dependent and may be de-prioritised in favour of achieving interactional goals. But House's premise does appear to hold true for informal, non-task-focused interactions occurring within the frame of an established relationship.

All of these findings point to a tendency among ELF interactants to refrain from orienting to potentially offensive teasing comments, instead assuming a jocular, solidarity-enhancing intent, as the upcoming examples will demonstrate.

4 Methodology

I turn now to the data upon which this study draws, and how analysis was carried out.

4.1 The Asian Corpus of English

The data in this qualitative study are drawn from the Asian Corpus of English (ACE) (ACE 2014), a corpus of English as a lingua franca in East and Southeast Asia. It comprises naturally occurring exchanges across a range of interactional contexts including diplomacy, law, education, workplaces and professional conferences, as well as the informal exchanges explored in this paper. The ACE corpus is an Asia-focused counterpart to the Europe-based Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE). The present dataset was compiled through analysis of informal, non-task-focused interactions in the ACE corpus, comprising 69 dyadic and multi-party exchanges of varying lengths totalling roughly 31 hours of talk. Eight nationalities are represented in the examples selected: Brunei, China, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam.

4.2 Analysis of the data

A key challenge in analysing teasing is to demonstrate the nature of a tease effectively; that is, whether the teasing utterance is jocular rather than cloaking an aggressive intent. Such characterisation is achieved in this study by means of a framework employed by Schnurr (2009) to license instances of workplace teasing as jocular. The framework explores in each instance: (i) how the tease is constructed (e. g. collaboratively or individually); (ii) how it is responded to (e. g. supported or contested); and (iii) who participated in it and to what extent.

Also relevant to the current analysis are linguistic, paralinguistic or prosodic markers which interactants deploy to mark their teasing as jocular. Haugh's (2010) study of jocular mockery lists lexical exaggeration, formulaicity, topic shift markers, contrastiveness, prosodic cues, inviting laughter, and facial or gestural cues, among others as contextualisation cues signalling jocularity. Recipients of jocular mockery (and, I argue, teasing more generally) may signal their acceptance of it as non-serious through laughter, explicit agreement with or appreciation of the mocking utterance, or (partial) repetition of the mocking utterance (Haugh 2010), among other markers. These will be central to my characterisation of samples of teasing in the ACE corpus as having been interactionally achieved as jocular rather than aggressive.

5 Findings: Teasing behaviour in the Asian Corpus of English

5.1 Jocular mockery

The first and most common type of tease to be examined here is Haugh and Bousfield's (2012: 1105) category of "jocular mockery," defined as "a specific form of teasing where the speaker diminishes something of relevance to someone present (either self or other) or a third party who is not co-present within a non-serious or jocular frame." To fit the category for the current study, however, some reconceptualisation is in order: Haugh and Bousfield frame jocular mockery as typically occurring in response to a stimulus by the (soon to be) target of the mockery, such as taking oneself too seriously, "overdoing" or exaggerating particular actions, like "complaining, extolling or bragging, slip-ups or exploitable ambiguity in what the target had previously said" (Haugh and Bousfield 2012: 1105) which then trigger a tease by an alter targeting those actions. But teasing in response to these stimuli is rare in the ACE corpus, as are teases which jocularly reproach the target for an earlier transgression or unintentional blunder (Drew 1987; Straehle 1993). In ACE, teasing is commonly occasioned in response to an innocuous comment by the target which is then exploited by the producer for its humorous potential (Armstrong 1992; Blythe 2012). I reconceptualise jocular mockery to reflect this.

Let us explore an example of jocular mockery in the ACE dataset. Example (1) presents a Thai male (ThM) and three females from Brunei (BrF), the Philippines (FiF) and Vietnam (VnF), all conversing informally during a language teaching course they are taking in Singapore. The diverse nationalities and shared profession of the participants, who have travelled to Singapore for professional training, suggests a newly formed, collegial relationship. The topics covered in the wider exchange (including their impressions of Singapore and of the course, and conditions in their local educational contexts) mark it as non-task-oriented.

- (1) a. (From ACE, ASEAN_ED_con_tourist sights and food, 18.51–19.40)
- 1 BrF: but you speak very good english
 - 2 FiF: yeah
 - 3 VnF: yeah
 - 4 BrF: VERY good english more (.) er grammatically correct
 - 5 VnF: right hh
 - 6 ThM: but but at first i was i was grown up in the atmosphere where

- 7 where grammar was taught through the grammar translation
 8 method =
 9 SS: = hm
 10 ThM: = and the teacher has to put so much emphasis on the (.) idea
 11 of [correctness] of
 12 VnF: [hm]
 13 BrF: cor[rect]
 14 VnF: [yeah]
 15 ThM: grammar that's a problem that because when when i when
 16 i have to speak when I need to communicate because
 17 [i am more concerned] about grammar tha-
 18 VnF: [because you always have to think]
 19 BrF: grammar
 20 VnF: grammar
 21 BrF: than [getting the message across]
 22 ThM: [if it is if it is] correct or not i don't like this
 23 BrF: so um: which means
 24 ThM: i want to speak more natural
 25 → BrF: natural grammar > you want to speak broken english you
 26 mean < [hahahaha h]
 27 VnF: [hahaha]
 28 FiF: [heh heh heh]
 29 ThM: *NO: BUT SOMETIMES*(.) ha ha heheh
 30 FiF: heh in the philippines we call it taglish

The likely jocular nature of the tease is underscored even before it occurs, when two co-participants offer supportive turns to an utterance produced by ThM (the eventual target): “grammar that’s a problem that because when when i when i have to speak when i need to communicate because i am more concerned about grammar tha- than if it is if it is correct or not i don’t like this”. VnF supports ThM’s turn at talk with a brief interjection in line 18, “because you always have to think [about grammar when communicating]” – signalling empathy and solidarity (as a fellow second-language user) with ThM’s concern for grammatical correctness. In line 21, BrF (producer of the tease in line 25 targeting ThM) also interjects a supportive utterance – “than getting the message across” – thereby herself affiliating to and expressing solidarity with the issue ThM raises. The teasing utterance itself is constructed individually, by BrF, who teasingly recasts ThM’s desire to “speak more natural” (line 24) as wanting to speak “broken English”. Her characterisation constitutes lexical exaggeration (Haugh 2010), which hints at the tease’s jocular nature. Prosody offers another clue: She

delivers the tease at a quickened pace, marking it as distinct from her previous turns, and concludes it with laughter, signalling the statement's non-serious intent. The tease is immediately ratified by laughter from the other two interactants (lines 27 and 28), thereby positioning them as participants in BrF's humorous turn. As to the target's response to BrF's teasing assertion: ThM's initial NO: in line 29, and the marked rise in pitch and volume of his voice relative to his previous turns, ostensibly suggest a contesting, oppositional stance. But the laughter that is audible in his voice, and his utterance-final laughter, both signal his support of and participation in the tease as non-serious "bonding," a brief, humorous aside in the exchange.

Significantly, the teasing sequence terminates almost immediately; the topic of English-medium instruction in the Philippines is introduced by FiF in line 32:

- (1) b. (From ACE, ASEAN_ED_con_tourist sights and food, 19.40-20.17)
31	BrF:	taglish
32	FiF:	taglish (.) tagalog and english and her and the our present
33		curriculum i know that i remembered that there it's content
34		based there are certain subjects that are taught
35		in english er:: hh for example in english the content maybe
36		science hh and in the: science or health any other languages
37		can be used the english is used as a vehicle but the content
38		is maybe science [or physics]
39	VnF:	[oh okay]
40	BrF:	[medium]
41	ThM:	[medium] of instruction
42	FiF:	yes it's english yeah
43	BrF:	okay we used to have that a long time when i was still at
44		school everything EVERYTHING was in english

Of interest here is the abruptness of the topic change ("tagalog and english and er and the our present curriculum") in line 32, occurring mid-sentence with no marking of the impending shift in topic. Topic changes – including very sudden ones – are a recurring feature of ELF talk (House 2002; Lesznyák 2002; Meierkord 1996, Meierkord 2000; Walkinshaw and Kirkpatrick 2014), more so in informal small talk than formal, goal-oriented discourse (Ahvenainen 2005). This is what happens in (1). No co-participant attempts to extend the teasing sequence or introduce a new line of teasing; ThM offers no counter-tease or protestation beyond his initial, truncated "NO: BUT SOMETIMES". The new topic is taken up by all three other interactants (lines 39–43) and the exchange continues along its prior trajectory.

5.2 Jocular agreement with negative self-assessment

A second type of tease which occurs in ACE is teasing/jocular agreement with an interlocutor's self-deprecating self-assessment. As Norrick (1993) argues, humorous self-denigration can perform a rapport nurturing function among interactants. Therefore a teasing agreement in response to a self-denigrating characterisation can serve to further nurture rapport between the producer and the target (provided the target interprets the tease as jocular and not aggressive). Self-deprecating self-assessments occurred frequently among speakers in the ACE corpus, and there are several instances of interlocutors offering a jocular agreement with such a negative self-assessment. Example (2) is such an instance. The interactants are a Vietnamese female (VnF) and an Indonesian male (InM) who are employed by the same company in Malaysia and share a collegial relationship. They are talking about how they will get home in rainy weather.

(2) (From ACE, MS_LE_con_10, 6.07–7.05)

- 1 VnF: and then why don't you use a train (.) i think a train will be faster
- 2 InM: (0.5) <n:ot faster > cheaper yes i agree but n:ot that faster (.)
- 3 also if you're you're go by (.) a car
- 4 VnF: (0.7) no let's say if it's raining (0.3) of course the (.) jam gonna
- 5 be stuck
- 6 InM: °mhm°
- 7 VnF: okay (.) so the taxi will be (0.5) [stuck] in the jam
- 8 InM: [yeah]
- 9 VnF: so if- in that way (.) in that case you should be in the (.) in the
- 10 l r t or the train =
- 11 InM: = but you have to wait until the rain stop (0.6) he hehehehe heh
- 12 VnF: aiyo how can you wait until how you know that the rain
- 13 gonna stop or no:t
- 14 InM: ha yeah nah on thursday I (.) take l r t but (0.8) er:: (1) i'm
- 15 kinda a lazy person (.) you know
- 16 → VnF: oh you are i think
- 17 InM: heh okay [thank you]
- 18 VnF: [heh heh heh heh heh]
- 19 InM: so (1.8) if possible i want to reach the home early =
- 20 VnF: = mhm
- 21 InM: so i can do (0.4) more stuff
- 22 VnF: okay (.) what kind of stuff you can do

Although this type of tease (being occasioned in response to a self-deprecating remark by the tease's target) could feasibly be framed as collaboratively constructed, in fact the mere utterance of a self-deprecating comment by one interactant does not *ipso facto* license a responding tease by another. VnF's teasing utterance in line 16 is individually constructed. The producer of the tease interpolates laughter particles (line 18) after her teasing utterance in line 16 to signal the jocular nature of her tease.

InM's response in line 17 ("heh okay thank you") signals his receipt of the tease as non-serious. He prefaces his turn with a single laughter particle and the discourse marker "okay" – hearable as signalling a supportive, cooperative stance toward a previous speaker's message (House 2013b). (In fact, this discourse marker has been shown elsewhere to serve a conciliatory function in ACE – see Walkinshaw and Kirkpatrick 2014). He then employs jocular sarcasm (Attardo 2002; Dynel 2009; Jorgensen 1996), thanking the producer as though she had complimented him on some positively valenced character trait. InM's likely aim is to frame his response as non-serious by employing sarcasm as a pragmatic marker of jocularity. This is jocular sarcasm's face-saving function (Jorgensen 1996); it makes the speaker appear less rude and unfair, "particularly when expressing a trivial criticism" (Jorgensen 1996: 613) – in this case, criticising the "nip" in VnF's teasing utterance.

In line 19 the target moves to return to the pre-tease topic, signalling it with the topic-shift marker *so*; his attempt is ratified by VnF's "mhm" supportive backchannel in line 20. She then takes up the previous topic herself in line 22. The conversation continues along its original trajectory from there.

5.3 Jocular insult

Jocular insult is defined as a bald-on-record verbal insult delivered within a jocular frame, broadly similar to the Australia-focused notion of "rubbishing your mates" (Goddard 2006), i. e. making mocking comments to a target with the expectation that these will be borne with good humour. Jocular insult differs from Haugh and Bousfield's (2012) category of jocular abuse by the absence of conventionally offensive expressions (such as their example, "oh, yo:u're a nobhea:d"); these are virtually non-existent in the ACE dataset.

Example (3) illustrates the jocular insult category. The interactants are a male from Thailand (ThM) and a female from Vietnam (VnF), as well as an unidentified female (UnF). The context is a workplace in Malaysia where ThM is a supervisor and VnF is an assistant manager. The three appear to have established a friendly and collegial relationship.

- (3) a. (From ACE, MS_PB_con_6, 00.35–1.10)
- 1 VnF: why you (.) why you like vietnamese coffee
 - 2 ThM: (0.3) maybe because i like vietnamese girl that's why (and so)
 - 3 VnF: excuse me: [i kno:w]
 - 4 ThM: [(I have to) put my] soul in the vietnamese style
 - 5 VnF: even you [can-]
 - 6 ThM: [and then that makes me happier]
 - 7 → VnF: even you drink a ton of coffe- vietnamese coffee you couldn't
 - 8 get vietnamese girl
 - 9 → okay?
 - 10 SS: ((general laughter))
 - 11 ThM: where yeah yeah
 - 12 SS: ((general laughter))
 - 13 ThM: i- i ↑KNOW i ↑KNOW [it's not tsk]
 - 14 VnF: [cos i know] the one he targeting in is
 - 15 (.) out of his HAND (.) aha ↑ha
 - 16 UnF: o:h wo:w
 - 17 ThM: o::h i KNOW [it's not (person' s name)]
 - 18 UnF: [okay (.) mhm (.) yeah]
 - 19 ThM: oh my god ha ha
 - 20 SS: ((general laughter))

The tease is constructed by VnF in response to ThM's humorous assertion in line 2 that he likes Vietnamese coffee because he likes Vietnamese girls. VnF begins her teasing turn in line 3 with "excuse me: I kno:w": The mild apology *excuse me*, typically uttered when interrupting another, serves here as a floor-gaining device. The slightly elongated vowel sounds also signal her desire to gain the floor. VnF attempts again to gain the floor with her repetition of "even you" in lines 5 and 7 overlapping with ThM's turns in lines 4 and 6 where he is attempting to explain his preference. Gaining the floor in line 7, VnF asserts that even if ThM were to drink a ton of Vietnamese coffee he would not be able to get a Vietnamese girl: a jocular insult, possibly extended in line 14 when VnF opines to UnF that "the one he targeting in is (.) out of his HAND", presumably meaning out of his league or beyond his reach. VnF's jocular insult appears to create solidarity by displaying familiarity, demonstrating that the relationship can withstand teasing and target-oriented humour (Béal and Mullan 2013). Dynel (2008) explains that

The appreciation of an aggressive tease relies heavily on the nature of the relationship of the communicators (Pawluk 1989). Intimates, more likely than strangers, can judge whether teases are devoid of truly abusive or downgrading potential. (Dynel 2008: 248)

Another important clue to the tease's non-literal nature is its "hyperbolised offense" (Dynel 2008: 255): The utterance "even you drink a ton of coffe-Vietnamese coffee" is clearly a lexical exaggeration. So it is marked as jocular because it deviates from the expectation that communication will be appropriately informative and truthful (Drew 1987); it flouts the Maxim of Quality (Grice et al. 1975). Despite the potential threat to ThM's self-image as attractive to others, he does not appear to contest the tease but receipts it as entirely jocular. ThM's immediate response (after they both laugh) to the tease, in line 11, is "yeah yeah", hearable as a token agreement with VnF's assessment. His utterance in line 13, "i ↑KNOW i ↑KNOW" seems to imply some shared knowledge between the three interlocutors which is not clear to an outside researcher, but is nonetheless hearable as ThF accepting the tease without retort. The final clue is the shared laughter: all the interlocutors temporarily disengage from the exchange because they are laughing.

As in previous examples of teasing in ACE, the teasing sequence ends within a few turns and another topic of conversation is initiated. The unidentified female initiates the topic change in line 29:

- (3) b. (From ACE, MS_PB_con_6, 1.28–1.51)
- 29 UnF: i i i know what you did last summer he he ↑he [he he
 30 VnF: [what did he
 31 do (0.8) what did you do (.) what did you do
 32 ThM: do what
 33 VnF: ↑i don't know what she said
 34 ThM: (0.4) i don't know? anybody would like to know what did i do?
 35 (0.5) last [night
 36 VnF [hey i see you all
 37 the time on facebook but you told me that you are at you were
 38 attending the c c m something conference but but all the time you
 39 were on facebook (0.6) what did you do there in the conference

No further teases are introduced by either interlocutor for the remainder of the exchange.

5.4 Banter

The last teasing type to be examined here is banter. Some scholars view banter as a single-turn verbal insult delivered within a jocular frame (e. g. Culpeper 2011; Leech 1983). But it has also been defined (e. g. by Chiaro 2009; Dynel 2008; Hay

2000; Norrick 1993) as a multi-turn teasing exchange, a “match of verbal ping-pong played by the two (or more) interlocutors within a jocular mode” (Dynel 2008: 244). The latter definition will be employed here in order to distinguish multi-turn exchanges from the single-turn teases discussed in preceding sections of this paper. I will also make a distinction between banter as it is defined above, and *goadi*ng (Mitchell 2015), a form of targeted banter wherein interlocutors cast humorous insults, criticisms or teases at one another over numerous turns with the expectation that these will be borne in good humour. Goading did not occur in the ACE data. The teases are invariably interactionally achieved as jocular; interactants appear to avoid teases that are interpretable as malicious. Nor are there any occurrences of a similar phenomenon which Decapua and Boxer (1999: 9) termed *jousting*, that is, “verbal duelling [between interactants which] entails dominating the floor, coming up with ever stronger and better put-downs, and having the last word” (cf. Labov 1997 on ritual insults). The instances of banter that occur do not take the form of put-downs and there is none of the one-upmanship (i. e. responding with ever-wittier ripostes) which is characteristic of verbal jousting. This may be partly due to the ostensibly conflictual nature of jousting, goading, and other reproaching teases: an extended sequence of escalating put-downs becomes increasingly hearable by targets as aggressive biting rather than humorous, non-serious mockery, since they index specific prior transgressive actions that the target may be sensitive about. As earlier sections have demonstrated, jocular insults did occur in the ACE data, but only over a very short sequence of turns, followed by a return to the prior conversational topic, thus limiting their impact in the event of a pragmatic “misfire” (Haugh and Bousfield 2012). Banter is in fact unique in ACE teasing behaviour, being the only type of teasing that takes place over an extended sequence of turns.

(4a), (4b) and (4c), all excerpts from a one-hour-long exchange, offer a prime example of teasing banter in ACE. The three interactants are all postgraduate students studying at tertiary institutions in Singapore. They are a Chinese female (ChF), a Chinese male (ChM) and an Iranian male (IrM). The topics being discussed (romance, travel and movies, among others) suggest that they are having an informal conversation and that a friendly, though not intimate relationship exists between them. The exchange appears to take place in a noisy social space, and in the early stages some women can be heard shouting and laughing in the background.

- (4) a. (From ACE, SG_ED_con_2, 4.58–5:23)
1	IrM:	actually (.) i was going to apply to n u s {national university of
2		singapore} i: contacted some of the professors at n u s and
3		(0.5) they said they don't have (0.6) they (1.2) they said they

- 4 wouldn't have uh:: (0.8) uh i'm distracted by the sound of
 5 [this uh:
 6 → ChM: [it's alright (.) i kno:w (.) you are distracted by
 7 → girls hahaha
 8 SS: ((general laughter))
 9 IrM: those girls are not good (.) ah the sound of the girls?
 10 [It sounds alright
 11 ChM: [it's alright
 12 ChF: ha ha ha ha ha hah
 13 IrM: Yeah they said that (1.3) th-the major was not available

(4) b. (From ACE, SG_ED_con_2, 9.19–9:41)

- 1 → IrM: uh so (2.4) different places to visit (0.5) and probably (.)
 2 beautiful girls too
 3 → ChM: su:re [su:re
 4 IrM: [a ha ha ha ha [you know
 5 ChM: [there's a lot
 6 ChF: [especially (.) Sichuan (.) province
 7 IrM: really? are you coming from that prov [ince?
 8 ChM: [no:: heh heh
 9 IrM: i thought you were coming from that province ha ha ha ha ha hah
 10 SS: ((general laughter))
 11 IrM: (to ChM) How about you

(4) c. (From ACE, SG_ED_con_2, 37.54–38:28)

- 1 ChM: have you been there?
 2 IrM: phuket?
 3 ChM: yeah
 4 IrM: no (.) °i haven't° heh heh heh
 5 ChM: a::h i (2) it's it's
 6 IrM: where is it? is it in malaysia? o:r
 7 ChM: no it's (.) thailand
 8 IrM: ↑THAILAND oh right right yeah my friends go there regularly
 9 ChM: you should go [you should go (.) really
 10 IrM: [yeah of course (.) they say they [say
 11 → ChM: [bring one of
 12 your girlfriends and go there heheh heh
 13 ChF: heh heh heheh
 14 IrM: > no actually if you wanna go to there you gotta go alo h ne <
 15 hah hah ha ha heh

- 16 ChM: oh yea::h it's heh heh heh heh
 17 ChF: hah hah he he he
 18 IrM: i just have he:::ard (0.4) have he:::ard (.) [I should try that he
 19 he he hhh
 20 ChM: [okay okay hhhhhh

I will examine each stage in turn.

In (4a), the first stage of the exchange, IrM appears to lose his train of thought in lines 1–5, as evidenced by repetition, fillers and extended pausing (“and (0.5) they said they don’t have (0.6) they (1.2) they said they wouldn’t have uh:: (0.8) uh i’m distracted by the sound of [this uh:”). He attributes his distraction to the sound of women shouting and laughing in the background. In reply, ChM teasingly characterises IrM as easily distracted by girls, signalling jocularly with sentence-final laughter particles. The kernel of the tease is its implication that IrM is distracted by girls *in general*, not just those making a noise in the background. His tease occasions general mirth. The topic of the tease leads to its likely evaluation as bonding, since the tease targets a common trait among males (i. e. being distracted by females) rather than a character deficiency. Apart from his laughter, IrM’s response to ChM’s tease (line 9) is non-committal; after querying that ChM is referring to the sound of the girls shouting in the background, he offers a phatic assessment of the noise: “it sounds alright”. IrM then ends the teasing sequence by shifting the topic back onto its previous track and picking up his earlier turn: “Yeah they said that (1.3) th-the major was not available”. He thereby normalises the conversation and enables it to continue (cf. Walkinshaw and Kirkpatrick 2014).

The second stage of the exchange, ([4b]), occurs about four minutes after the first. IrM (the original target of ChM’s tease) briefly picks up the topic of the earlier tease again (“uh so (2.4) different places to visit (0.5) and probably (.) beautiful girls too”), acknowledging his receipt of it as jocular and employing it to further humorous effect. ChM (the original producer) immediately affiliates to the re-introduction of the topic, uttering “su:re su:re” with elongated vowel sounds to emphasise his affiliation. IrM’s ensuing laughter in response signals his continued acceptance of and participation in the sequence. Once again, the topic shifts suddenly (House 2002; Lesznyák 2002; Meierkord 1996, Meierkord 2000; Walkinshaw and Kirkpatrick 2014) and the prior topic – places to visit in China – is resumed. Of note here is that the original tease (targeting IrM’s purported distraction by women) is re-framed by IrM (the original target) as a topic of shared humour rather than a tease: no target is specified. His uptake of the earlier teasing sequence underscores his acceptance of it as jocular bonding.

The topic of ChM's original tease (i. e. that IrM is distracted by women) is returned to again in the third phase of the exchange ([4c]), this time initiated once again by ChM. The conversation has turned to the island resort of Phuket, Thailand, where IrM says (line 4) he has never been. ChM interjects with "bring one of your girlfriends and go there heheh heh", his sentence-final laughter signalling non-serious intent. Interestingly, the recurrence of the tease topic is hearable as an extension of the original tease by ChM targeting IrM, rather than just conversational humour as in the previous stage. The phrase "one of your girlfriends" humorously characterises IrM as attractive to women. But the fact that this characterisation occurs as part of an established line of teasing is hearable as implying the opposite. And although we have no way of knowing how good-looking IrM is we may presume that ChM's "one of your girlfriends" is a lexical exaggeration (Haugh 2010), another possible nip at IrM. But IrM indexes his receipt of the tease as jocular by further extending it with a humorous rejoinder in line 14, again recasting the tease topic as a shared joke: "> no actually if you wanna go to there you gotta go alo h ne < hah hah ha ha heh". The turn's humorous intent is foregrounded through its quickened delivery, the laughter particle interpolated in "alo h ne" and the turn-final laughter. IrM seems to be implying that if he goes to Phuket alone he will meet a woman there; he uses prosody to hint at this in line 18, exaggeratedly lengthening vowel sounds in "i just have he:::ard (0.4) have he:::ard" (i. e. that it is easy to meet women in Phuket). He thereby exploits the value of the earlier tease as a continued source of humour among all three participants.

6 Discussion

This section maps the findings from the data analysis against the three research questions proposed at the outset.

I will firstly outline the interpersonal functions of teasing among Asian ELF speakers, insofar as the ACE corpus is representative of their teasing practices. The teasing appears to serve an essentially jocular (bonding or nipping) function. This tallies with House's (2013a) assertion that ELF talk tends to orient to solidarity and consensus more than to conflict, at least in informal, non-task-focused exchanges. No teases identified in the ACE dataset of informal, non-task-oriented exchanges can be characterised as biting, that is, there is no evidence of aggressive or insidious intent by the producer. In each case there exists some form of meta-message from the producer (commonly laughter, prosodic cues or lexical exaggeration) characterising the tease as non-serious

nipping or bonding, which alerts the target to the tease's jocular nature (Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997).

As to specific teasing strategies that are employed, this paper has explored some typical examples of teasing behaviour as it manifested in ACE: jocular mockery; jocular agreement with a target's negative self-assessment; jocular insult; and banter. These are not intended as an exhaustive list of the teasing practices available to ACE interactants communicating in ELF. Furthermore, the teasing practices deployed in other circumstances (e. g. formal, task-oriented or where a hierarchical structure exists) may differ from those employed in the informal small-talk contexts explored here. Clearly, considerable potential exists for further enquiry into these areas.

I now turn to how targets appeared to evaluate the teases aimed at them and how the broader teasing sequences played out in each instance. Two key findings emerge: firstly, the target almost invariably receives the tease as jocular. There are no instances of offense being expressed by a target or any other recipients co-participating in the exchange. Nor did targets have occasion to respond with another tease targeting the original producer. These characteristics of ELF teasing in ACE may reflect a desire to demonstrate solidarity with the teaser rather than a dissonant response which might interrupt the flow of the interaction or be perceived as aggressive or threatening to interactional rapport (cf. Walkinshaw and Kirkpatrick 2014). This finding supports Meierkord's (2000) claim that ELF speakers often suspend their judgment in the face of unusual or ambiguous linguistic activity, recognising that all co-participants are norm-divergent second language users and that the potential exists for misunderstanding (cf. Lesznyák 2002) occasioned by lexical or syntactic irregularities or pragmatic infelicities. As such, it seems likely that targets in the ACE dataset, when confronted with the inherent ambiguity of teasing behaviour, tend to assume a jocular rather than aggressive intent. Another clue to this apparent non-serious orientation is the apparently humorous ripostes with which targets are wont to respond to teasing utterances, such as mock-thanking the producer ([2]), mock agreement with the producer's teasing assessment of the target ([3]), or a target's adoption and recasting of the tease as a running joke ([4]).

Secondly, teasing sequences very often terminate within a few turns of the tease being delivered; participants consistently refrained from extending teasing sequences or introducing other teasing sequences later in the exchange. The jocular mockery sequence in (1) ends amid general laughter; one of the participants then abruptly introduces another conversational topic which is taken up by the others. The teasing exchange in (2), a jocular agreement with a target's negative self-assessment also terminates immediately after the tease is

delivered: the target re-introduces the prior topic, and the conversation continues along its original trajectory. Even the jocular insult in (3) concludes after only a few seconds when one of the interactants introduces a new topic, “I know what you did last summer”, setting the conversation on a new course. The only exception is the sequence of banter in (4), wherein the topic of the original tease is reintroduced several times for humour value, and occasions laughter each time. The important thing about the banter sequence is that it is marked as jocular bonding by the producer and receipted in kind by the target. Such an extended sequence would be much less likely to occur if aggressive undertones were present – and indeed, no such sequence exists in the ACE dataset mined for this study.

7 Conclusion

Although previous ELF studies have explored humour (e. g. Pullin Stark 2010), there has so far been little enquiry into ELF teasing practices, particularly in Asia. The current study therefore advances knowledge in this area, demonstrating that teasing is frequently occasioned in informal ELF interaction in the Asian Corpus of English.

In concluding this analysis, two caveats are in order. The first is that the focus of this research is on the ACE corpus and no claim to a more general applicability is intended. Teasing practices that occur in other corpora (particularly those drawn from other geographical regions) may well diverge from those in the Asian Corpus of English. The second is that no claims can be made about the teasing practices of specific nationalities. ELF being an endonormative mode of communication (Seidlhofer 2011), users co-construct their own interactional norms *in situ* to a greater extent than drawing on their pre-existing linguistic/cultural norms.

I also stress that the findings outlined here are tentative; they are intended to seed further exploration of ELF teasing practice in different situated contexts, among different communities of practice, and incorporating different dimensions of formality, hierarchy, social distance, gender and other interactional variables. Nor should enquiry into this field be necessarily confined to corpora. Corpus research offers a broad insight into the communicative practices of a particular group, but there is a clear need for a more nuanced methodological approach to augment it, particularly for examination of pragmatic phenomena, which are frequently positioned “beyond what is said.” House (2012) advocates a multitude of data from different genres and different subjects, as well as

triangulation of data with post-hoc interviews and other reconstruction protocols in order to compile a more complete picture of the pragmatic practices in play in cross-cultural encounters – including those between speakers of English as a lingua franca.

Acknowledgements: Thanks are due to Michael Haugh, Andy Kirkpatrick, Leticia Stallone and Sophiaan Subhan, as well as the anonymous reviewers of this article. Thanks also to Nguyen Xuan Nhat Chi Mai for translating the title, abstract and key words into Vietnamese.

Notational conventions

(0.5)	a time gap in tenths of a second
(.)	a pause in talk of less than two-tenths of a second
=	“latching,” i. e. no discernible gap between turns at talk
[]	marks the onset and end of a spate of overlapping talk
((laughter))	indicates a non-verbal activity
wor-	sudden cut-off of a prior word or sound
wo:	a stretched vowel or consonant sound
(words)	approximate transcription of unclear speech
?	a rising inflection
↑	a marked rising intonational shift
<u>Under</u>	speaker emphasis
CAPS	markedly louder speech
°words°	markedly quieter speech
<words>	markedly slower speech
>words<	markedly faster speech
words	audible smile
hh	voiced laughter particles
{words}	gloss for word or acronym

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Bionote

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