

Practicing English Lingua Franca Skills: A Glimpse of a Saudi Arabian Classroom

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المخلص

تضيف هذه الدراسة تصنيفاً جديداً لسياقات التفاعل الصفّي والتي حددها Seedhouse (1996, 2019) "مجتمع اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة مشتركة" كنوع آخر من السياقات التفاعليّة في الصف. لا يزال السؤال حول كيفية تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية لإعداد المتعلمين للتواصل مع غير الناطقين بها في عصر العولمة مطروحاً. واهتمت هذه الدراسة بمعرفة إلى أي مدى يمكن للمحادثات خارج التمارين الصفية بين معلمة باكستانية وطلابها السعوديين في إحدى الجامعات السعودية من دمج الطلاب في محادثات باللغة الانجليزية من نوع (الإنجليزية كلغة مشتركة) وتم استخدام نهج تحليل المحادثات. أظهرت النتائج أن الخروج عن موضوع الدرس يمكن أن يهيئ الطلاب للتعامل مع الحديث الغير المخطط له والذي يشبه التواصل في الحياة الواقعية. حددت الدراسة أيضاً نوعين من الحديث خارج نطاق موضوع الدرس: حديث بناء العلاقات والحديث التعاوني.

Abstract

This study extends the typology of interactional classroom contexts identified by Seedhouse (1996, 2019). It suggests the “English lingua franca community” context as another type of classroom context. The question of how English language teaching classrooms can prepare learners for communicating with non-native speakers in the era of globalization remains open. This study examined the extent to which off-task conversations between a Pakistani teacher and her Saudi students at a Saudi Arabian university might engage students in ELF conversations. Interaction analysis was informed by the conversation analysis approach. The findings showed that getting off-topic could prepare students to deal with unplanned talk that resembles real-life communication. Also, the study identified two types of off-task classroom talk: rapport-building talk and cooperative talk.

Keywords: classroom contexts; classroom interactional competence; English as a lingua franca; off-task conversation; teaching English

Introduction

Educational researchers and linguists call for teaching the communicative skills of English as a lingua franca (ELF) in English language teaching (ELT) classrooms (Dewey, 2014; Lewandowska, 2019; Rabab'ah, 2015; Seidlhofer, 2001; Vettorel, 2018). The purpose of these calls is to prepare students for communicating with non-native English speakers in the time of globalization. There are some studies that have identified the common communicative strategies found in ELF talk in academic settings, such as code-switching, compensation, paraphrasing, humor and rapport-building, which can inform the practices of EFL teachers for adapting an ELF-aware approach (Björkman, 2014; Lewandowska, 2019; Rabab'ah, 2015). However, the number of studies that scrutinize the merits of ELF conversations in ELT classrooms from the conversation analysis perspective (CA) is scarce (Matsumoto, 2015).

With the purpose of this study being to draw the attention of ELT teachers toward exploring the possible merits of infusing an ELF-aware approach during off-task talk, the availability of such studies will expand the available literature on this topic and will guide ELT teachers in creating a communicative classroom context that resembles communication with non-native English speakers in real life and thus improve the students' linguistic skills in order to meet the requirements of the global marketplace. The study demonstrates the interlocutors' use of their communicative interactional competence (CIC) skills in order to achieve mutual intelligibility, such as clarifying misunderstanding and managing turns (Walsh, 2011). When students extend their CIC skills, they possibly engage in conversations that resemble real-life conversations in ELF contexts. To the best of my knowledge, studies that investigate exploiting ELT classrooms for creating opportunities for practicing ELF communicative skills that can be found among non-native speakers in real-life conversations are limited (Siqueira, 2020). Informed by the CA approach, this study answers the following question:

To what extent can ELT classrooms provide students with opportunities for practicing ELF skills?

As revealed by this question, this study demonstrates how ELF and ELT integrate in one classroom.

There are a plethora of studies on classroom interaction. Seedhouse (1996, 2019) identifies different types of classroom interactional contexts: form and accuracy context, classroom as speech community context, task-oriented context, real-world target speech community context, text-based context and procedural context. These types explain how teachers create different classroom contexts guided by their pedagogical plans. Seedhouse urges educational researchers to identify more types of classroom contexts and does not limit the classification of classroom contexts to these types. The present study extends Seedhouse's classification and suggests the "English lingua franca community" context, a context that is characterized by spontaneously non-pedagogical interaction. The next section reviews the literature on teaching ELF.

Literature Review

ELF has received different conceptualizations. For instance, House's (1999, p. 74) definition of ELF interactions is "interactions between members of two or more different linguacultures in English, for none of whom English is the mother tongue." Firth (1996, p. 240) extends the term ELF to refer to "a contact language between persons who share

neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language for communication.” These two definitions agree that ELF is a tool for intercultural communication. In a new conceptualization of ELF as communication, speakers of different “linguacultures” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 164), including non-native English speakers and native speakers, choose English as the common language. Based on this new interpretation of ELF, switching to languages other than English in an ELF context is a natural phenomenon.

English as a Multi-lingua Franca

Some ELF scholars recognize that native speakers can also participate in ELF communication (see Seidlhofer, 2009). Jenkins (2015) has expanded the conceptualization of ELF to include English as a multi-lingua franca. This new conceptualization takes into consideration the presence of other languages in ELF communication (i.e., the speaker’s mother tongue or languages other than English). The next paragraph explains how “culture” and “communication” are positioned within the field of ELF.

One of the theories that underpin ELF and explain the notion of intercultural communication is the communication accommodation theory (CAT; i.e., how speech is adjusted by speakers to interlocutors; Baker, 2015). CAT is a theoretical framework for interpreting intergroup and interpersonal communication. It explains why, when, and how people adjust their communicative behavior during social interaction. Entailing having the focus on cultural and linguistic features, Zhu (2011) emphasizes interaction and negotiation as the key terms of intercultural communication. Since the word “culture” is a broad term, Scollon et al. (2012) replace the term “intercultural communication” with the term “inter-discourse communication.” By this replacement, the focus of analysis is on discourse communities and related social factors such as profession and gender (Scollon et al., 2012). The following section discusses how ELF is addressed in ELT classrooms.

ELT in ELF Contexts

The two main ELF fields that have received researchers’ full attention are business in ELF (BELF) and ELF in academia (ELFA; Baker, 2015; Mauranen, 2012). For the purpose of this study, the review of literature will focus on ELFA. There are some studies that have investigated the interactional features of ELF communication in ELT contexts. For instance, a survey study by Luo (2018) explores the attitudes of Japanese university students toward ELF and finds that these students are aware of using ELF for communicating with non-native English speakers. Another corpus analysis study by Björkman (2014) identifies comprehension checks, confirmation checks and clarification requests as frequent ELF strategies among exchange students at a Swedish university. In a similar study conducted outside the classroom by Hanamoto (2014), the focus is on the types of communication strategies used when breakdown occurs (e.g., confirmation checks, clarification checks, comprehension checks and self-repetitions) during the interaction between Japanese students and international students studying at the same Japanese university. The CA approach was employed for the sequential analysis of turns. These studies in ELF or ELT classrooms pay attention to conversations between learners in group works or outside the classroom.

There are studies that investigate interaction in teacher-fronted classrooms. These studies examine the features of talk occurring between students and teachers in ELF contexts.

For instance, Matsumoto (2015) investigates the communicative strategies by non-native English speakers or ELF speakers in the context of ESL writing classrooms at a U.S. university. The study, concluding that miscommunication can be beneficial in achieving mutual understanding among ELF speakers via creating an interactional space for constructing negotiation, combines the sequential analysis of discussions (CA) and ethnographic information from interviews and observations. A few pedagogical studies have examined how training students for using ELF communicative strategies improved their linguistics performance according to post-tests scores (Dimoski, Yujobo & Imai, 2016; Rabab'ah, 2015). There are calls for teaching ELF communicative strategies in ELT classrooms (Lewandowska, 2019; Vettorel, 2018).

Due to the small number of published studies on training English language learners for using ELF communicative strategies, language teachers and educational researchers may benefit from ELF studies carried out in non-educational contexts. These studies highlight natural interactional features of ELF talk. For instance, some studies examine humor and rapport-building in natural settings, such as social media and workplace (Brunner & Diemer, 2018; Jenks, 2012a; Pullin, 2010, 2011). With some studies looking at multimodal communication strategies in business (e.g., gestures, gaze and objects; see for example Räisänen, 2020), other non-academic studies focus on cooperative strategies in ELF conversations, such as providing lexical help, lexical repetition and approximation (Ting & Pha, 2008).

An interesting study by Nurmi and Koroma (2020) highlights the importance of creating a psychologically safe language environment for non-native English speakers' employees in the workplace. The study suggests that non-native English speakers feel less anxious about their language use and they engage in supporting each other in order to cope collectively with the job demands. When these studies are taken into consideration by language teachers and material designers, one can widen the knowledge and practices of English language teachers on teaching ELF communication. The following paragraph explains why it is important to pay attention to ELF practices in ELT classrooms.

Many non-native English teachers seem to emphasize the teaching of standardized native speaker model (i.e., British or American English) in classroom practices, although the teaching practices of non-native English teachers are different from those practices by native English teachers (Maley, 2009). Learners cannot be aware of the uniqueness of English if teachers themselves are not aware of the world Englishes (Maley, 2009). Seidlhofer (2001) explains that it is essential to implement an ELF approach in classroom practices to develop learners' competency skills for managing miscommunication and achieving mutual intelligibility. Similarly, Dewey (2012) stresses out the need for establishing principles of professional ELT that enables learners to communicate with the world using ELF.

Dewey (2014) adds that ELT syllabus needs to be modified to meet ELF challenges. Jenkins (2012b) draws the attention of general exam boards (e.g., TOEFL and IELTS) to the importance of rethinking language assessment from an ELF perspective. In some ELT book materials, conversations are planned through designed scenarios where learners are given some time to plan them, using resources such as dictionaries. There is still a need for more research studies that examine interactional features in teacher-fronted classrooms for the purposes of guiding teaching practices, assessment and material design toward implementing ELF approaches, with learners needing to know and experience how to communicate with

others in unplanned situations via naturally occurring conversations. The following section discusses some features of ELT classroom interaction and the merits of off-task talk in relation to ELF.

Classroom Interaction and Off-task Talk

Cook (2010) explains the various concepts of language, one of which is language as action. The meaning of language as action refers to the individuals' competence in communicating with native or non-native communities, an interpretation that includes both language as a community practice and language as a set of sentences (Cook, 2010). Cook's view fits within the socio-cultural theory, originated with Vygotsky (1896–1934). This theory views learning as the creation of meaning through social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). ELT researchers have been engaged in examining the role of interaction in facilitating language learning. One of the terms that pay attention to the features of classroom interaction that can maximize learning is CIC (Walsh, 2011, 2012). The term CIC is defined as “teachers’ and learners’ ability to use interaction as a tool for mediating and assisting learning” (Walsh, 2011, p. 158). Also, Walsh (2012) explains CIC further “CIC focuses on the ways in which teachers’ and learners’ interactional decisions and subsequent actions enhance learning and learning opportunities” (p. 5).

Walsh (2012) identifies three features of CIC. The first feature is that the language used by the teacher should be in tune with his pedagogical aims and should match the linguistic levels of learners. Secondly, with the notion that interaction can be maximized by adapting different strategies, such as increasing wait-time and extending learners’ turns, teachers need to provide learners with learning space through this interaction. Thirdly, teachers need to play a significant role in shaping learners’ contributions. Shaping entails paraphrasing, scaffolding and repairing input. With off-task conversations being an encouraging opportunity for using their CIC, teachers need to create opportunities for their learners to maximize this CIC.

Research studies that examine off-task talk in ELT classroom and its role in facilitating language learning in teacher-fronted classrooms are scarce (Illés & Akcan, 2017). Available studies focus on off-task talk in collaborative peer interaction and its role in language learning (McDonough et al., 2016; Stone, 2019). There are still more merits to unveil concerning off-task talk that assists learning English. Off-task talk could take a different form from the interactional pattern of institutional talk in which teachers initiate a question, students respond, and teachers give feedback (IRF pattern; Long, 2018). In addition, it differs from communicative textbook activities in which students have time to think of their answers and then share them with others. As this study will show, off-task talk can resemble conversations occurring in ELF contexts (i.e., authentic interaction). The next section provides some background information on the context of this study.

Background: ELT in Saudi Arabia

Preparing Saudis to interact with people from different nationalities and cultures through English is one of the educational objectives of teaching English in schools (see Elyas & Badawood, 2016, p. 78, for the full objectives), with ELT in Saudi Arabia going back to the 1950s and English being taught in the country as a compulsory subject, starting from the primary school level. The number of Saudi universities is approximately 33. English is a compulsory module at all universities, and some majors are taught in English. Language programs are usually designed and provided by the language centers at these abovementioned

universities and there is no one unified guidance for language instructors at Saudi universities and colleges that discusses language teaching approaches and addresses common language learning obstacles. The textbooks used vary from one university to another. However, language centers are careful about using textbooks designed by well-known international publishers (e.g., Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press and Macmillan). Language teachers at these centers are Saudis, other Arab nationals and non-Arabs. There are no accurate statistics for the number of non-Saudi teachers teaching English in the Saudi higher education sectors. The following paragraphs predict how recent social and political changes in Saudi Arabia might shape ELF teaching.

The country witnesses economic and social changes. The date 27th September 2019 marks the country's move toward becoming a global destination for international tourists. Visitors to the country can come with a tourist visa for the first time in the history of the country. In the past, visas were limited to the purposes of performing religious duties (Hajj and Umrah) and to visiting a relative working in the country. This decision by the Saudi government will offer more jobs in tourism for young Saudis. The status of English might increase because Saudi nationals will find it the only language to use with non-Arabs in the meantime, where, further, the country has offered attractive incentives for international investors to increase its economic power in the region. Therefore, language centers at universities need to prepare Saudis for using English for communication with ELF speakers in authentic situations, and should utilize the presence of non-Arab instructors for creating authentic atmosphere that resembles life outside the classroom. Also, books designers need to focus on content that familiarize language learners with the notion of ELF and highlight ELF communicative strategies.

Materials and Methods

The data for this study came from a large set of unused data collected by the researcher during her PhD project between 2010 and 2011 for a different research purpose, namely, implementing critical thinking skills to improve speaking skills (Alnofaie, 2013). The present study included detailed transcriptions of 300 minutes of audio recording of one class at a language center that belongs to a Saudi university. The class was observed for 12 weeks. Like other Saudi universities, this university teaches English skills as a compulsory module. English skills module was taught by a Pakistani lecturer whose second language was English. She was an experienced lecturer with a teaching background over 20 years in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. There were 18 Saudi students in this class, whose mother tongue is Arabic, and who majored in business and administration. All the participants have signed consent forms prior to the start of the data collection, and all ethical procedures have been followed by the researcher. The book contents focused on the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and included various topics. The data were audio-recorded and collected randomly over the 12 weeks. The total number of recorded sessions was six sessions, and the length of each session was 50 minutes.

The data analysis was informed by CA approach. The purpose of using CA is "to discover how participants understand and respond to one another in their turns at talk, with a central focus on how sequences of action are generated" (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998, p. 14). Also, CA allows for scrutinizing the socio-cultural approaches for language learning

(Seedhouse, 2007). The transcription was done manually, and the transcription conventions were adopted from Jefferson (2004). In the cases of off-task talk that were not recurrent cases, but were rich of ideas related to the merits of off-task talk, there was a close focus on these off-task conversations, taking into consideration how such talks were initiated, for what purposes, and how did off-task talk create learning opportunities. The following section presents the results of this study.

Results

This section presents extracts from the recorded lessons. Extract 1 is from a lesson entitled “philanthropy.” The teacher talks to her students about the importance of giving and how it builds bonds in the society by giving examples (Extract 3).

Extract 1

- | | | |
|-------|------|--|
| 85 | T: | Ramadan Ramadan mostly all of us find some way of giving |
| 86 | | food clothes money work- |
| 87 | Son: | -Teacher |
| 88 | T: | Yes |
| → 89 | Son: | £Today is the book£ day we should er choose er something |
| 90 | | About the books |
| → 91 | T: | Okay you er <tell me which which book do you think you |
| → 92 | | were> er er taught you something about giving |
| 93 | Son: | Giving? |
| 94 | T: | Yah an- any story okay tell me a story which help you to |
| 95 | | Know that giving is very important |
| → 96 | Luj: | Cinderella ((laughter)) |
| 97 | T: | What do you think ((laughter)) er and how does Cinderella help |
| 98 | Luj: | (Help) her sisters= |
| → 99 | T: | =Stepsister |
| 100 | Sn: | She was good to them |
| 101 | T: | And what did they and how and how did how did how did ah |
| 102 | | God help her (0.5) |
| → 103 | Sal: | Ah she’s married a prince |
| 104 | T: | Okay she got you know a beautiful prince a handsome prince |
| → 105 | | to marry her off so her life changed she’s what about your |
| → 106 | | Favourite books girls |

- 107 S?: £Cooking£ a:nd sew the dress
- 108 T: ↑ Really
- 109 S?: Yah
- 110 T: £You will become a good housewife£
- 111 ((class laughs))
- 112 S?: [May be]
- 113 T: [Alright] let's go to number er number three we can answer
- 114 number four I want somebody to read number four

Son draws the teacher's attention to the World Book Day and she suggests talking about a topic related to this international event (line 89). The student here initiates off-task turn (pointing out an international event). The teacher tries to get the student back to track by relating the student's interest to the topic being discussed (lines 91–92). Son's response to this question is off-task because she mentions Cinderella followed by her laughs (line 96). Her turn marks a new sequence. The teacher laughs back and asks the student to elaborate more. While the student elaborates on her contribution, the teacher continues shaping the student's contribution by providing a more appropriate word “stepsisters” instead of “sisters” (line 99), which exemplifies a cooperative strategy of ELF communication (Ting & Phan, 2008). The off-task talk continues as the teacher shifts her focus from discussing the ways of giving to asking students about their favorite books (lines 105 and 106). The teacher's comment on the student who likes cookbooks and sewing “you will become a good housewife” (line 110) creates laughs. The student extends her turn by saying “may be” (line 112).

What is notable here is that the talk is generally informal and spontaneous. The teacher does not correct the student's utterance for accuracy in line 107. The conversation here is not aligned with the standard English that characterizes ELT classrooms, and the teacher's let-it-go strategy helps to maintain the flow of talk. Humor found in this extract exemplifies real-life conversations among ELF users (Jenks, 2012a). The analysis of this extract reveals that, since opportunities for practicing real-life conversations can be created, teachers should not feel guilty when they are off-task. After these off-task interactional turns, the teacher ends this talk by using the marker “alright” to mark the transition to answering the book activity (line 113). Extract 1 demonstrates another type of off-task talk that resembles real-life ELF talk which is building rapport. Extract 2, from another lesson, shows that the teacher and her students discuss an activity in the book which requires students to rank places that they think they need support.

Extract 2

- 118 T: ↑ Alright y:es [Sw]
- 119 Saw: First one hospital and second one mosque third
- 120 one community
- 121 T: Okay the third one is a community centre alright what is a
- 122 community center does because I want to tell you something

- 123 community centers you can do a lot of work in a community
 124 center what is a community centre (1.0)
 125 ((students whisper))
 → 126 T: Girls what do you mean by community center
 → 127 Nuh: (Helps the) problems of the people-
 128 T: Community center is a place let's say Rawda(.) it's
 129 district they have a hall a big hall there and this
 130 place you can use it for teaching you can use it for
 → 131 weddings you can use it for helping the community

In lines 121 and 122, the teacher asks the students about the meaning of community centers. In line 127, Nuh volunteers to explain the meaning of this word, followed by the teacher's elaboration for simplifying the question (lines 128–131). In the following extract (Extract 5), the teacher continues the explanation of community center and she starts sharing her personal experience with the community center in her area.

Extract 3

- 138 T: where I was an active part in the (?) this community center
 139 was in the area just like you have what you call Rawda or Zahra
 140 district or something like this and everybody who lived in that
 141 community ha- and they knew something for instance I was good at
 142 English or typing or shorthand I had to go for one hour to give
 143 my time once a week or twice a week and all the girls from the
 144 area would come (talk continues)
 145 I used to teach typing and shorthand you know because I felt it
 146 something something that can get them a job=
 → 147 Luj: =Miss typing and what?
 148 T: Shorthand shorthand is a special language when you listen to the
 149 radio you take down notes so it's a special language that you
 150 have and if you know that you can get a very good job you know
 151 especially a secretarial job so-
 → 152 Luj: Are they poor or-
 153 T: No no no they're not poor sometimes they just do for fun
 154 sometimes it's you know (.) they have vacation and all the girls

155 they want to go to sch- just like this (?) it's one hour you
 156 T: know so they say let's go together sometimes it's how to teach
 157 them dancing

In this extract, while the teacher continues her story with giving, Luj initiates two turns (lines 147 and 152). Luj's turns show that she is engaged in her teacher's story. The teacher explains why she tells her students about her story with giving in extract 4.

Extract 4

160 T: You nee::d to begin something like this girls and you need
 161 to actually get ready in one week for it because most people
 162 they uh- I'm talking about giving today because
 → 163 <I want you to get this feeling> how can you give (.)
 164 ((talk continues))
 165 so that is the idea of the community girls how many neighbors
 166 know you don't know too many neighbors it is a very
 167 good way of bringing people in the community together-
 168 Son: T::eacher we see our neighbors in Ramadan in mosque only

It seems that when teachers share their stories with their students, they try to build rapport. In line (163), the teacher gives another example of how students can engage in giving (lines 165–167), and tries to inspire her students to build that sense of giving. The example she mentions here is giving to neighbors. By emphasizing the importance of being kind to neighbors, the teacher teaches morality and seems to adapt the role of a mother here. The teacher's kind words make Son feels comfortable to share her opinion about the relationship among neighbors and that people rarely meet these days (line 168).

These lines in extracts 3 and 4 shift from traditional teaching, where teachers focus on the teaching of the coursebook activities, and deviate from the traditional classroom interactional pattern (IRF). The teacher motherly talk, as the one in lines (160–163), is meant for building rapport which characterizes talk by non-native English speakers (Pullin, 2010). Also, the teacher talk here helps students to initiate turns in (lines 147–152–168). Providing students with opportunities for initiating turns and expressing their thoughts and feelings freely can create a psychologically safe language environment which is a requirement for ELF communication in real-life (Nurmi & Koroma, 2020). Extract 5 shows another example of building rapport through humor. Extract 5 is taken from a lesson on emotional intelligence. Students are asked to name people whom they find intelligent.

Extract 5

82 Kal: My cousin

83 T: Why

84 Kal: Because a:: she is a doctor who care about patients and

85 spend her life for them.

86 T: interesting who else

→ 87 Jam: Angelina Jolie

88 T: Angelina Jolie? why?

89 Jam: she help poor people in[the world]

→ 90 Reh: [I like her personality too]

91 ((overlaps))

92 T: Be quiet

→ 93 Hal: Teacher who is your favorite actor?

95 T: God! Favourite actors↑... I don't watch movies (0.8)

→ 96 You know when you become a teacher you will not find

→ 97 time for watching movies (.)

98 Students laugh

→ 99 Kal: teaching is hard hehe

100 Ran: I ↑like watch sc::are

101 T: You must be brave

(laughs)

102 Hal: Y::ah me too

→ 103 T: ↑Okay now girls lets this is very interesting I have a

104 little ai ee kew test for you that's why I want you to

105 do it quickly alright (.)we talk about this intelligence

106 testing background please open your ... you have your

Jam mentions Angelina Jolie as an example of intelligent people (line 87). Reh initiates a turn to comment on Jam's turn "she is a good actor" (line 90). Hal initiates an off-task talk when asking the teacher about her favorite actor (line 93). The teacher's reply is humorous "when you become a teacher you will not find time for watching movies" (lines 96–97). This turn by the teacher encourages Kal to comment "teaching is hard hehe" (line 99). Humor is a common ELF strategy among non-native English speakers (Jenks, 2012a; Pullin, 2010, 2011). Ran extends Kal's turn to express her view (line 100). What is interesting is that Ran does not provide a well-structured utterance, however, the teacher does try to correct the utterance and let the conversation move on (line 101). The let-it-pass strategy by the teacher shows that the focus on competency is more than the focus on accuracy, a feature of ELF interaction, and this

integration between ELT and ELF is highly encouraged in the language classroom (Siqueira, 2020). After this short off-task talk, the teacher switches to the book and asks students to answer an IQ test in the book (line 103).

Discussion

This study demonstrates the integration between ELT and ELF in a higher education setting. Examining the features of ELF communication in ELT classrooms in the higher education sector has not been widely explored (Matsumoto, 2015; Siqueira, 2020). The fact that the teacher and her students did not share the same L1 did not hinder their use of CIC skills which implies meaningful interaction (see Walsh, 2011), with the particular focus of this study being thus to investigate the extent to which off-task conversations that occurred between the teacher and her students could provide a space for practicing ELF communicative strategies that resemble real-life conversations. The following paragraphs discuss the main findings of this study in detail.

The study suggested “English lingua franca community” classroom context as an additional classification to Seedhouse’s (1996, 2019) classification of classroom contexts. This proposed classification is characterized by the natural and spontaneous turns between teachers and their students that resemble real-life conversations. Although Seedhouse (2004) proposes the “real-life target speech community” context, it refers to the teacher’s pedagogical aim for replicating real-life conversations. The proposed “English lingua franca community” context results from a non-pedagogical aim, as it occurs naturally without replicating real conversations. It contributes to learners’ competency for communicating in ELF contexts.

The study highlighted two types of off-task conversations that resemble real-life conversations in ELF contexts: cooperative talk (extract 2) and rapport-building via creating humor (extracts 1 and 5) and giving advice (extract 4). In these extracts and some lines-specific extracts presented in the Results section, and not to say that the IRF pattern is not effective in ELT classrooms, the type of interaction between the teacher and her students moved away from the institutional interaction patterns (IRF; see Long, 2018). What is meant here is that the interactions in these extracts, which were not related to answering the coursebook activities, occurred naturally and resembled interactions that occur among non-native English speakers in real life, beyond the classroom walls. Although the teacher did not plan for incorporating the teaching of ELF in her classes, the natural ELF communications that occurred can draw language teachers’ attention toward considering the teaching of ELF skills, in response to calls by educational linguists. During ELF conversations, the interactants did their best to communicate effectively via employing their CIC skills, which indicates that implementing ELF in ELT classroom and language testing can lead to promising effects (Dewey, 2012, 2014; Jenkins, 2006; Seidlhofer, 2001). The following paragraph explains how these CIC skills were implemented by both the teacher and students in relation to relevant literature.

The extracts presented in this paper reveal aspects of ELF conversations identified by earlier studies in non-academic contexts. The teacher played a crucial role in dealing with off-task talk as a venue for practicing ELF communicative strategies and creating learning opportunities. Where cooperative strategies are common practices by non-native English speakers for overcoming communication breakdowns and moving forward with the

conversation (Ting & Pha, 2008), we see in extract 1, for an example, the teacher's efforts to provide the students with the appropriate word and shape learners' responses during off-task talk were in tune with cooperative talk found in non-academic contexts.

Another aspect of ELF communication that was observable in this class was the rapport-building conversations. In extracts 3 and 4, the teacher initiated the off-task talk in order to share her personal experiences with learners and advise them for the purpose of building rapport with her students. As a result of the teacher's motherly talk, the students felt confident to build on her turns (e.g., line168). Humor was another example of rapport-building strategies (e.g., extract1). In real-life conversations, humor is a common feature in ELF socializing (Jenks, 2012a). In types of classroom contexts that should be encouraged in the higher education sector in order to prepare learners for ELF communication that they will encounter in the era of globalization, the conversations in these extracts reveal that EFL classroom can be a fertile venue for practicing ELF skills. To sum up the discussion, the findings of this study highlight the need for increasing the awareness of non-native English teachers for preparing their students for ELF communication. Off-task conversations, if managed effectively by teachers, could provide learners with opportunities for practicing their CIC skills for dealing with unplanned talk.

The significance of this study appears in extending the classifications of EFL classroom contexts identified by Seedhouse (1996, 2019) to include the "English lingua franca community" context. Another significance lies in extending the limited literature on the merits of off-task conversations in ELT classrooms for practicing ELF communicative strategies that can be found in real-life. The findings of this study contribute to literature by relating the practices of CIC to ELF contexts. As studies that explore ELF communications in Arab countries are scarce, a fourth significance point is the context of this study. The majority of available studies shed light on speaking ELF in ELT classrooms in European or East Asian contexts (Björkman, 2014; Hanamoto, 2014; Matsumoto, 2015). While these studies will help curriculum designers to rethink their designs in order to prepare language learners and teachers for dealing with global Englishes (Dewey, 2014), the availability of such studies will add in-depth understanding of the integration between ELF and ELT in the higher education sectors and will inform the practices of language teachers in order to prepare their students for communication with non-native English speakers (Dewey, 2012, 2014).

The recurrence of this type of natural ELF interaction is constrained by following the assigned textbook, a point that is apparent in the teacher's efforts to redirect her students' attention to completing the textbook activities, as seen in line 113 of extract 1 and line 103 of extract 5. This explains why the number of instances of teacher–student off-task conversations identified and reported in this study was not recurrent in this context. Out of the 300 minutes recorded, ELF talk accounts for 53 minutes (about 17% of the total data). Since this study does not fully explore the topic of infusing ELF-aware approaches in ELT classrooms, future studies should identify the additional merits of such implementation. Factors that may hinder the adaptation of ELF-aware approaches also need to be examined.

Conclusion

The present study represents a small step forward in revealing some of the merits of infusing ELF-aware approaches in ELT classrooms. Through examining ELF communicative strategies

employed during off-task talk, the study identifies the “English lingua franca community” context as a type of interaction that can be added to Seedhouse’s (1996, 2019) typology of ELT classroom contexts. It concludes that off-task conversations in ELT classrooms in ELF contexts encourage students to prepare for unplanned talk that resembles their real-life communication with non-native speakers. The study identifies two types of off-task talk that resemble real-life talk in ELF contexts: rapport-building talk and cooperative talk. Researchers need to conduct further studies to highlight additional features of ELF talk in the classroom. Consequently, the findings of this study are expected to contribute to ELT classroom practices in ELF contexts.

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Bio

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