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Interactional Sociolinguistics: The Theoretical Framework and Methodological Approach to ELF Interaction Research

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Abstract

The prevalent use of ELF in global communication necessitates a rethinking of what theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches are appropriate to explain the changing and complex nature of intercultural interactions, particularly, those whereby English is recognised as a passport. This review accounts for ELF interactions in terms of Interactional Sociolinguistics (IS). In doing so, it discusses the characteristics and functions of IS taking into consideration the complexity of ELF contexts, most notably intercultural encounters that are prone to misunderstandings and communication breakdowns. Further, based on an analysis of previous studies on ELF, the paper characterises ELF interaction and its key components, and ELF interactional ecology using Interactional Sociolinguistics as a theoretical framework.

Introduction

English has now gained a prominent linguistic position as a world lingua franca for both intra- and international communities (Baker & Ishikawa, 2021; Galloway & Numajiri, 2020; Jenkins, 2015: Mahboob, 2018). The prevalent use of English for both kinds of community means, among other things, that non-native speakers currently outnumber those who use the language as their L1. One of the corollaries of this changing scenario is that while native-like proficiency is becoming less relevant, the use of accommodation skills that are conducive to establishing mutual understanding is more required for successful intercultural communication.

When people from very diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds come into contact with each other, their interactions are inherently complicated, adaptive, dynamic and emergent (Canagarajah, 2020; Cogo & Dewey, 2012; Jenkins et al., 2011; Mahboob, 2018; Mauranen, 2012; Schneider, 2012; Seidlhofer, 2004; Thompson, 2021; Toomaneejinda & Harding, 2018), what Firth (2009) calls the 'lingua franca factor'. For this reason, these interactional phenomena need a particular theoretical and research method that can empirically and systematically reflect how English is used as a common means of intercultural communication. In this respect, Interactional Sociolinguistics (henceforth IS) has currently gained currency in providing powerful insights into the mechanisms of the highly dynamic interactions where English is used as a lingua franca, or 'ELF'. How these mechanisms proceed underscores, according to McKay and Bokhorst-Heng (2008), the important roles of social knowledge and cultural context in interpreting linguistic interactions.

This paper will offer a review of Interactional Sociolinguistics and its theoretical and methodological contributions as well as its certain dimensions that can be applied in an investigation of ELF interactions which are highly linguistically and culturally diverse. The paper also highlights the use of an ethnographic approach and the mutual benefits that the ELF perspective will get when taking an IS approach into consideration and vice versa.

The structure of this paper is as follows. First, the paper will delineate the theoretical foundations and main characteristics of Interactional Sociolinguistics, which focuses on the interplay of linguistics,

culture and interactive conventions (Gumperz, 1982). This is intended to elicit how such an approach can provide insights into intercultural communicative practices. The second part of the paper will focus on the English language when it is used as a world lingua franca, including its definition, characteristics and research implications. The use of English as a common means of international communication calls for a unique approach that can fully explicate such complicated and emergent interactions. Finally, the integration of Interactional Sociolinguistics into ELF research will be considered both as a theory, in which language, social contexts and cultural knowledge are equally made the subject of investigation, and as a research methodology which is qualitative and interpretive in nature (Gumperz, 1999). These two aspects will help us better understand the present ELF interactional phenomena.

Interactional Sociolinguistics (IS): Background, Approach and its Contributions

Background

Interactional Sociolinguistics, developed primarily from the works of John Joseph Gumperz, is a theory and methodology directed to the understanding of the way interactants signal and interpret meaning in interaction through an analysis of social interactions integrating linguistic, anthropological and sociological perspectives (Gordon, 2011; Schiffrin, 1996; Tannen, 1992) to build a single qualitative, interpretive approach and develop the analytical procedures for sociolinguistic analysis. The goal here is to uncover the relationships of language, cultural diversity and social life (Gumperz, 1982, 1999). In addition, Gumperz (1999) claims that this approach can be applied to any kinds of interaction, be they inter- or intracultural encounters.

Interactional Sociolinguistics, therefore, provides powerful insights into how (intercultural) communication proceeds and how differences regarding expectations and interpretations can lead either to successful interactions or especially to communication breakdowns. According to Gordon (2011), participants who get involved in interlingual communication bring with them with their own 'briefcase' of acceptable international norms, expectations and interpretations. This results in the need for an ethnographic-based research methodology with which to

analyse everyday face-to-face interactions in which the interlocutors involved attempt to build a consensual meaning from sequential interactional turns (Rampton, 2007). IS thus adopts a multimethod approach using observations, interviews and discourse analysis to gain both etic and emic perspectives (Cogo & Dewey, 2012; McKay & Bokhorst-Heng 2008). Moreover, IS also foregrounds contextual presuppositions or what interactants bring with them, apart from their language(s), to their verbal exchanges because these presuppositions exert a powerful influence on the interpretation of contextualisation cues and their situated inferences (Schiffrin, 1996). According to Gumperz (2001), contextualisation cues entail "verbal and nonverbal, segmental and non-segmental, prosodic, paralinguistic and other (cues) that, as past and ongoing research shows, speakers and listeners demonstrably rely on as part of the inferential process" (p. 223). As such, within the IS approach previous sociocultural experiences, communicative expectations and other factors which are left unsaid in a certain interchange will be analysed simultaneously. With its analytical and methodological resources, Interactional Sociolinguistics can account for (un)successful intercultural communication and how interactants can understand others and make themselves understood (Holmes, 2013), as well as how they handle specific linguistic forms and interactional strategies (Rampton, 2007). Given the fact that Interactional Sociolinguistics is interdisciplinary in nature, there are many scholars and theories that have made a great contribution to its framework.

Interactional Sociolinguistics as a Theoretical Framework

Gumperz (1982) argues that the great change within sociolinguistic strands applying the interpretive approach of IS to the study of language in interaction will enhance an understanding of what is covered in verbal exchanges. In fact, it is unlikely that interactional analysis can be separately investigated from its social and cultural contexts where linguistic acts are produced and perceived. In deciding what to say and how to say it in a certain speech event, as well as how to make a correct interpretation, a microanalysis of the social features, the interactants' sense of self and their background knowledge in the interactional context are indispensable (Canagarajah, 2020; Gordon, 2011; Jaspers, 2013; McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008). This is evident especially when the interactants in a certain

communicative event have different contextual presuppositions of the same interactional cues. This will result in differently situated inferences, as well as potential miscommunication. The theoretical contributions of Interactional Sociolinguistics thus explain how speakers use and interpret contextualisation cues (Gordon, 2011) as well as how conversational inferences can be made, which are often through their own past experiences and ad hoc situations.

Primarily, Gumperz's approach to Interactional Sociolinguistics was theoretically inspired by the work of Garfinkel and Goffman (Gordon, 2011; Gumperz, 1982; McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008; Schiffrin, 1996). Although Goffman's focus is not linguistic, his contribution to IS comes from his acute interest in the construction of social interactions (Gordon, 2011) and the relationship between the speakers' sense of self and the society in which interactional activities occur (McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008). Goffman claims that the way speakers choose to express themselves can reflect how they frame their interactional situation (Goffman, 1974), their sense of self and their perceptions towards their interlocutors. These perceptions can be viewed through the concept of face which interactants construct and maintain during the course of their verbal interchanges (Goffman, 1967). According to Gordon (2011), the contribution of Garfinkel to IS comes from his observation of the important role of sociocultural background knowledge in conversational interpretation and later the development of the sociological approach of ethnomethodology. Garfinkel (1967) foregrounds the importance of the interactants' taken-for-granted background knowledge, situational expectations and unstated social rules in making conversational inferences. Interactional Sociolinguistics, according to Bailey (2008), thus brings to the forefront the importance of linguistic and social perspectives in signalling and interpreting meaning in interaction. IS thus becomes a means of understanding the role of language and social relationships, a way of identifying interactional problems and the interactional strategies used to maintain communication and achieve interactional goals (Gordon, 2011).

More specifically, IS puts an emphasis on the contextual elements within a certain interaction in terms of their underlying meaning and its impact on interpretive processes. It underscores the importance of participants' repertoires and of having shared knowledge and community norms to interpret these interactionally important cues (Holmes, 2013).

Contextualisation cues thus collectively and reflexively inform the local frame within which an interpretation is made (Bailey, 2008).

One of the most important analytical issues in Interactional Sociolinguistics is the role of prosody in meaning-making processes. According to Gumperz (1982), prosodic features such as intonation, changes in loudness, stress, variations in vowel length, phrasing and shifts in speech register, occurring during an interaction, determine interactional success by projecting social space and thus exert a powerful influence on inferential processes through which interpretation and expectation are negotiated. Pickering (2009) argues that intonational structures can lead to misinterpretation especially among those who are not aware of their underlying communicative functions in intercultural communication. Gumperz (1982) contends that these contextualisation cues directly affect interactants' attitudes towards the utterances and this can ultimately result in miscommunication. Specifically, he puts it, "A speaker is said to be unfriendly, impertinent, rude, uncooperative, or to fail to understand… Miscommunication of this type, in other words, is regarded as a social faux pas and leads to misjudgements of the speaker's intent" (p. 132). As such, it should be noted that for successful communication to be achieved all these factors need to be shared.

Apart from paralinguistic features as contextualisation cues, IS also underscores the role of code-switching in (intercultural) communication. Gumperz (1982, 2001) claims that the use of code switching by multilingual speakers is similar to the way in which monolingual speakers use prosodic, syntactic or lexical features to convey their intended meanings which, in turn, exerts a powerful influence on shifts in contextual presuppositions and then interpretation. Gumperz argues that individuals' change of linguistic codes conveys not only semantic but also communicative purposes: quotation identification, addressee specification, interjections or sentence fillers, reiteration, message qualification and identification of degrees of speaker involvement. In this case, the alternation of available linguistic codes thus has the facilitative role of enhancing mutual understanding (Mauranen, 2012) and maintaining smooth interaction. However, although a certain meaning and function cannot be exactly assigned to each code-switching practice, this can be analysed when it co-occurs with other contextualisation conventions in interactional processes.

Interactional Sociolinguistics as a Research Methodology

To gain insight into the complex process of (intercultural) encounters, IS adopts an ethnographic approach to communication to carry out a microanalysis of social interactions; therefore, by also including multi-methods in its analysis, it provides both etic and emic perspectives through insights gained from both researchers and participants (McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008).

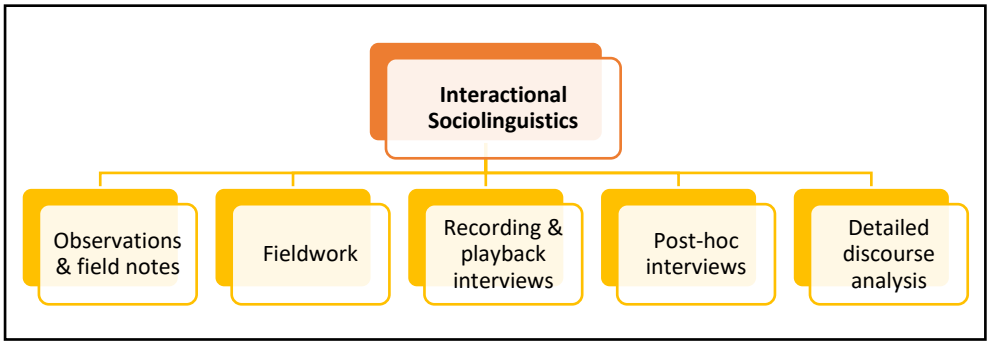
According to Gordon (2011), IS primarily comprises observations of speakers in naturally-occurring contexts gained through participant observation, and audio- and/or video recording of interaction. It also includes detailed linguistic transcription of recorded conversations, allowing careful micro-analysis of conversational features in the context of the information gained through ethnography, and post-recording interviews. Schiffrin (1996) suggests that both a process of immersion in the interaction and a high quality of audio and/or video recording of naturally-occurring interaction are necessary since a researcher needs to draw on and repeatedly view the recorded interchange to find a pattern in the regularities of a certain interaction. In addition, because contextualisation cues, e.g., facial expressions, voice tones and gestures, are subtle and ephemeral, recorded interaction, in this case, will allow the researcher to hear and see those tiny cues which, when combined with a linguistic message, strongly affect situated inferences and can lead to miscommunication. This also helps the researcher to assemble and easily retrieve the data when necessary. Moreover, recorded interactions of interest can sometimes be used in playback interview sessions to elicit retrospectively the cognitive processes behind the speakers' interactional behaviours. This playback method will allow a researcher to discover speakers' contextual presuppositions, situated interactional inferences and communicative strategy practices (Gordon, 2011).

After the interactions have been recorded, according to Schiffrin (1996), they will be fully transcribed along with the details of any prosodic information and other contextualisation cues in order to identify the phases of interactions and the way language constructs, co-constructs, or is constructed by, the interaction. The detailed transcription is accordingly perceived as the backbone or main data source of the IS approach

(Tannen, 1992) and this is sometimes supported through post-hoc interviews. Figure 1 illustrates the key research methods used in Interactional Sociolinguistics to investigate the interplay of linguistic, social and cultural issues.

Figure 1

Interactional Sociolinguistics as a Group of Research Methods



By using this multi-method approach, IS thus provides a more comprehensive interpretation and explanation of the construction of interactional meaning and behaviour (Lazaraton, 2002). As far as Interactional Sociolinguistics is concerned, Holmes (2013) argues that it is primarily concerned with a detailed analysis of conversation, particularly turn-taking, hesitations, pauses and paralinguistic features. It should be noted that, superficially, the IS approach to an interactional text seems to be similar to that of conversation analysis (CA). That is, both approaches are concerned with an analysis of authentic everyday face-to-face interactional discourse by looking at what is achieved from the turn-taking of the speakers involved (McKay & Bokhorst, 2008). However, unlike conversation analysis which focuses on interactions in an attempt to look for the universal patterns of their communicative practices (McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008), IS-based discourse analysis (DA) has extended its analysis by taking into account the multidimensionality of the wider sociocultural factors and contextualisation cues through which interactions occur. Indeed, conversation analysts, according to Gumperz (2001), want to understand empirically the overt linguistic structures of

interactions in order to account for the universal social orderliness of verbal exchanges by focusing on turn-by-turn sequential analyses or the relationships of speaking turns towards conversational achievement. On the contrary, IS investigates more extensively both the interactional products and the meaning-making or interpretive processes of a certain interaction through the combination of both the 'in- and off-text' factors for its analysis. In particular, Gumperz argues that IS recognises interaction as a reflexive process in which preceding talk, immediate circumstances and even past events all play a pivotal role in any inferential procedures. Table 1 summarises the common and different characteristics of the two approaches to the analysis of a conversational discourse.

Table 1

The Difference Between Conversation Analysis and Interactional Sociolinguistics Discourse Analysis (DA) (Source: Adapted from Gordon, 2011)

Characteristics	CA	DA
1. Examining actual social encounters	✓	✓
2. Involving recording, a form of careful linguistic transcription, and analysis of interaction	✓	✓
3. Outlining a 'systematics' for conversation based on the basic organisational unit of the conversational turn	✓	✓
4. Considering the sense of context (discourse context) in its analysis and taking a broader perspective on what constitutes context and its effect on conversation		✓

Note. Adapted from "Gumperz and interactional sociolinguistics," by C. Gordon, 2011.

As such, an Interactional Sociolinguistics analysis of an interactional text is rather different from the way CA enquires into any particular discourse. Interactional Sociolinguistics extends itself into the analysis of other factors outside the discourse under investigation. It draws on the interplay between the ethnographic and demographic information of both the context and the participants to bring out the processes of interaction (Lazaraton, 2002).

English as a Lingua Franca (ELF): Definition, Characteristics and Research Implications

Definition

Given that English is not infrequently the sole lingua franca among speakers from various sociocultural backgrounds and that currently there are more non-native speakers of English than those who use it as an L1, ELF has been gaining currency in applied linguistics in general and in intercultural communication studies in particular. It should be noted, however, that ELF has been variously defined, particularly concerning the issue of whether or not English native speakers should be included where English is used as an intercultural communication instrument. Earlier definitions tended to exclude native speakers (Firth, 1996). More recently, according to Schneider (2012), ELF is the use of English as an auxiliary language spoken by participants who do not share the same first language, which is congruent with Seidlhofer's 2017 definition of ELF as "a means of communication among those who share no other language and is used by people in all parts of today's globalized world" (p. 391). ELF, in both these definitions, thus includes English native speakers, and this is the position adopted in this paper. The nature and current extent of globalisation is such that it has become unrealistic to restrict the definition of ELF only to communication between non-native speakers.

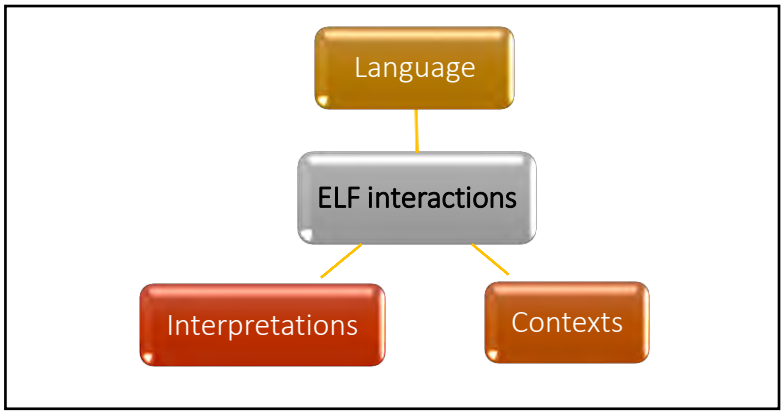
Characteristics

Instead of seeking an exact definition for this dynamic tool of communication, Jenkins (2013) suggests that ELF has the following main characteristics: (1) it is a medium of communication for those with different first languages; (2) it is an alternative for learners or speakers rather than a replacement for English as a foreign language (EFL) and it depends crucially on their needs and preferences; (3) ELF is a unique linguistic innovation shared by most ELF speakers; (4) because ELF's forms and meanings are situated within contexts, it involves the use of various kinds of communicative skills and pragmatic strategies to facilitate

communication, such as accommodation and code-switching; (5) codification is drawn from the description of proficient ELF users. ELF is thus a truly adaptive and complex system which is 'context-bound and usage-oriented' in nature. Canagarajah (2013) demonstrates important characteristics of the English language that are used in multilingual communities. He illustrates the dynamic interactions between languages and communication, where communication plays a more pivotal role than the difference or similarity of individual languages and correct linguistic forms. Rather, communication involves different linguistic resources and ecological affordances; or as Cogo (2008) puts it, "form follows function." In this case, ELF communication and its interpretive processes are constructed and negotiated throughout the course of the interaction. That is, in ELF interactions which are emergent in nature, language is dynamically adapted to suit the interactional context. This is to enhance mutual understanding and to achieve highly diverse communicative needs. The key components of ELF interaction are depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Key Components of ELF Interactions



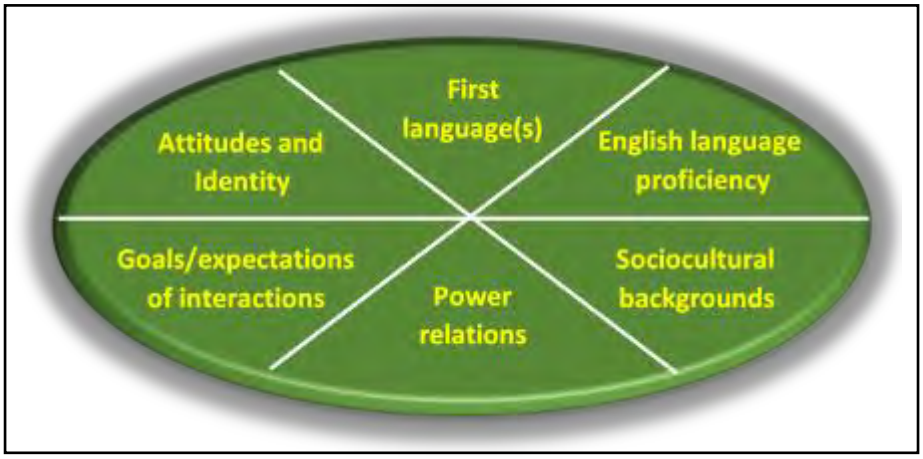
In these multi-ethnic contexts, meaning arises through negotiation practices in local situations, rather than from the use of correct grammatical norms, which are open to negotiation and reconstruction by individual interlocutors in each specific (new) communicative situation (Canagarajah, 2013). Languages used in this kind of interaction thus

change over time, context and space to generate new grammars as well as discourse and pragmatic meanings. Despite the dynamic and complex nature of ELF interactions, surprisingly they do not lead to non-understanding, miscommunication or even communication breakdown. Instead, most studies in the field, such as Cogo & Dewey (2012), Dewey (2007), Firth (1996, 2009), House (2009), and Mauranen (2006), to name a few, argue that interlocutors tend to use intercultural and collaborative skills and transform both the linguistic and non-linguistic resources available, including code-switching and a fairly broad set of lexicogrammatical and pragmatic strategies, to accommodate their interactions. For example, there are requests for repetition or clarification, making the meaning explicit, as well as paraphrasing, comprehension checking, self- or other-repairing, etc. Given that ELF speakers are aware are aware that situations of either non- or misunderstanding can potentially be rescued and made feasible, Mauranen (2012) argues that they always employ interactional strategies to pre-empt and maintain mutual intelligibility. In this case, intercultural communication via ELF is less problematic than has been anticipated and demonstrated in previous intercultural communication studies. To date, ELF studies attempt to reveal, describe and make sense of the functional properties of ELF interaction, including its processes and the way interactional strategies are used to maintain effective and successful communication (Cogo, 2011).

Given the fact that intercultural encounters in which English is the only medium of communication are highly diverse in terms of the speakers' first language(s), attitudes and identity, cultural backgrounds, power relations, goal/expectations of the particular interaction as well as sociocultural orientations (Cogo & Dewey, 2012; McKay & Bokhorst, 2008), as illustrated in Figure 3, the interpretation of the linguistic features and the construction and maintenance of the particular interactions are also subject to this diversity. If the ultimate goal is successful intercultural communication, it is evident from ELF interactional ecology that the sociocultural backgrounds of speakers are inseparable from the interaction and that the influence of the settings in which the interactions occur determines the way the encounters proceed (Gu et al., 2014).

Figure 3

ELF Interactional Ecology with its Great Diversity



The Integration of Interactional Sociolinguistics into English as a Lingua Franca Studies

To make sense of ELF interaction, it is necessary to examine various influential factors. Apart from the linguistic issues themselves, the role of prior and ad hoc situational contexts as well as common ground building come into play to enable successful intercultural communication rather than for participants to be restricted to prefabricated language, prior expectations and pre-existing frames of interpretations (Kecskes, 2013; Mahboob, 2018). As such, a theoretical approach that incorporates these factors into its analysis and perceives them as an ongoing process of meaning (co)construction and interpretation will yield a better understanding of the processes of intercultural communicative practices, in general, and ELF interaction, in particular. Here, attention will be drawn to the adoption of an Interactional Sociolinguistics approach to the study of ELF interactions, particularly by focusing on the theoretical implications of their convergence. However, previous studies that more or less apply IS to their analyses will also be highlighted.

Theoretical Convergence and Previous Studies

Theoretical Convergence

Because of the unique characteristics of ELF interaction which comprises speakers from very diverse linguistic and sociocultural backgrounds and those with different levels of English language proficiency and goals of interaction, an IS approach to intercultural communication studies becomes a practical foundation and toolbox for uncovering systematic interpretive processes contributing to the way interlocutors create, maintain and achieve their communicative goals and involvement, particularly in institutional and workplace settings (Gumperz, 2001). Koole and ten Thije (2001) suggest that there is a need for a unique theory and research methodology that are sensitive not only to a linguistic perspective but also to the interactional ecology of specific interchanges.

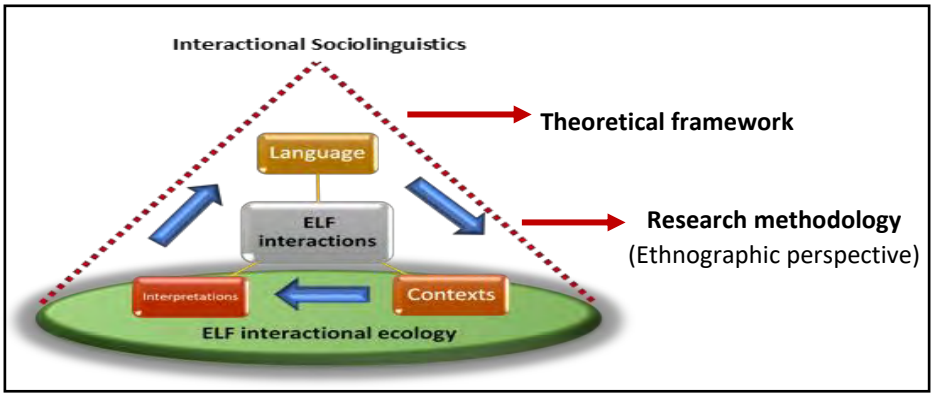
However, as far as diversified ELF contexts and interactions are concerned, traditional conversation analysis (CA) tends to lack explanatory power and needs a unique approach that can construe the multidimensionality of social interaction practices, rather than taking a solely linguistic perspective alone. As Cogo and Dewey (2012) have put it, "…English has become a worldwide lingua franca (that) has major linguistic consequences. To investigate the lexicogrammar and pragmatics of ELF in proper depth requires distinctive methodological and theoretical frameworks for conducting empirical research" (p. 25). Therefore, this "distinctive approach to analysing talk… is better suited to ELF studies" (p. 32). In this case, they call for the integration of an approach to ELF interaction using conversation analysis and ethnography to create a "combined perspective" in order to provide rich detail and a full understanding of the phenomena and the surrounding context.

Using an IS approach to analyse intercultural communication in which English is used as the lingua franca becomes a great tool to draw out the unique mechanisms and cues that facilitate participants from diverse linguistic and sociocultural backgrounds to interpret the interactional intents of those involved in a certain interaction and achieve mutual understanding. As a consequence, adopting IS to analyse intercultural and interethnic communication, as Gumperz (2001) puts it, is "… useful in isolating systematic differences in interpretive practices that affect individuals' ability to create and maintain conversational involvement and

consequently to get their views across" (p. 223). For example, although Cogo and Dewey (2012) do not explicitly state the use of IS in their study, they combined a CA approach with an ethnographic perspective, believing that this should provide both emic and etic perspectives on an interaction and its cultural contexts since IS can elicit accounts from both the participants and the researchers. They claim that the contexts of interaction exert a powerful influence on the language used by those involved in the interchange and also the dynamics of the interaction. To put it another way, the advantage of analysing and generalising ELF interactions through an Interactional Sociolinguistics lens is to view the English language as a true international means of intercultural communication whereby a fully-described context of interactional activities, including the interactants' demographic information, social context and interactional purpose, is of much significance (McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008). Figure 4 shows the integration of Interactional Sociolinguistics as a conceptual framework and a methodological approach to the study of a highly diverse and contextually-bounded ELF interaction.

Figure 4

Interactional Sociolinguistics and ELF Interaction Studies



Interactional Sociolinguistics and ELF studies

As outlined above, Gumperz's original 1982 description of IS foregrounds the important role of contextualisation cues, particularly the

intonational structures that promote or obstruct successful inter-ethnic communication. Gumperz also argues that when interactants from different social backgrounds come into contact, they always bring with them a unique interpretive frame of those prosodic features, frequently resulting in a clash of situated inferences and miscommunication. However, ELF studies demonstrate that ELF speakers are aware of the potential interactional problems caused by misinterpretation of such paralinguistic cues.

As such, speakers are generally quite cautious about their effects on the interaction and develop certain strategic tools to facilitate their verbal interchanges. Pickering (2009), for example, investigates intonational structure and its role as a resource of information and interpersonal convergence in ELF interaction. She argues that pitch movement cues in the shape of tone and key choices are meaningful and have a strong impact on the success of ELF interactions. That is, they are employed to signal critical communicative points in the encounters, to negotiate resolution between interlocutors and to repair conversational sequences instead of being used only for socially integrative and face-saving purposes, as found in interactions among English native speakers. Prosodic features, in this case, are prominent, unique and become a valuable linguistic and pragmatic resource for effective and successful ELF communication in which the interlocutors have developed their own norms for using and interpreting these features. She also finds that ELF interlocutors are likely to employ certain fixed patterns of intonation which are perceived as universal intonation. However, she suggests that to enhance our understanding about the role intonation plays in naturally-occurring ELF interaction, a detailed description of discourse context is indispensable.

Because of a lack of shared linguistic and pragmatic norms among ELF speakers, ELF interactions seem to be vulnerable to miscommunication. However, speakers involved in such interactions are aware of problematic communication instances and are likely to proactively prevent or pre-empt such moments by drawing on available pragmatic resources (Cogo & Dewey, 2012). Most studies of ELF pragmatics have highlighted the way speakers skilfully use pragmatic strategies to respond to and resolve potential non-understanding (Jenkins et al., 2011; Kaur, 2009) as well as to support and ensure their communication (Cogo & Dewey, 2012). Kaur (2009) argues that ELF users,

regardless of their linguistic, sociocultural and English language proficiency backgrounds, necessarily employ repetition and paraphrase as strategies to avert instances of non- or misunderstanding and ensure successful interaction. Her study, however, indicates that the interactants evaluate their communicative performance and are apt to choose the most efficient strategy in order to deal with a certain interactional difficulty. The repetition of a prior utterance, for example, is employed when the speakers realise that their interlocutors are encountering a hearing difficulty. On the other hand, ELF speakers will use paraphrase when they recognise that their listeners have a problem understanding a prior exchange. She further suggests that mutual understanding and successful communication in ELF interaction are the result of good collaboration among interactants themselves by the interlocutors carefully monitoring each interactional turn.

Apart from ELF speakers' ubiquitous use of interactional strategies to ensure smooth interaction and to achieve their communicative goals, they also employ an alternation of the codes available in their linguistic repertoire in order to achieve their interactional purposes. Although code switching has long been perceived negatively in second language acquisition as filling gaps in the speakers' L2 knowledge, within intercultural communication in general, and in ELF encounters in particular, switching exhibits the social dynamic (Gumperz, 1982) and necessarily helps to expand the meaning of specific utterances as well as enhancing the interlocutors' multicultural background and identity (Cogo, 2011). By employing the findings of a study of more than 40 hours of recorded naturally-occurring conversations among language teachers in a higher education institutional setting and combining these with an ethnographic perspective, Cogo (2009) found that code-switching has certain conversational accommodating functions and that it is often used by ELF speakers to (1) facilitate meaning-making and emphasise the content of certain expressions; (2) ensure the understanding and efficient delivery of talk; and (3) express the speakers' cultural and social identity. Moreover, her study also shows that ELF speakers creatively employ their multilingual resources to maintain social and in-group relations. However, she argues that it is difficult to assign a specific communicative function to each code partly because some multilingual speakers have more than 2 language options in their repertoire. Also, individual ELF speakers have

their own preferences, perceptions and expectations towards their available linguistic choices.

In short, previous studies of ELF interactions underscore that the contribution of Interactional Sociolinguistics is thus the extent to which the approach can systematically account empirically for the relationship between meaning and interaction, as well as interactional meaning-making processes in which speakers have their own norms to construct, maintain and interpret verbal activities. Furthermore, by using different research methods, particularly post-hoc interviews, IS itself also stresses the importance of balancing the perspectives of both language users and researchers. The use of IS thus helps gain more insights into intercultural communication in general and ELF interactions in particular.

Challenges of Interactional Sociolinguistics

Despite its theoretical and methodological contributions to the study of intercultural interactions, IS itself also poses some concerns about its underlying tenets. Firstly, Interactional Sociolinguistics limits itself to the study of face-to-face interactions and only to off-line spoken interchange. This gives rise to questions around the advancement of communication technology which changes the way in which interactions in general and intercultural communication in particular can take place. For example, there is a blurred line between spoken and written discourse whereby the unique characteristics of spoken language (e.g. the use of less formal words and structures, the use emoticons or stickers to express emotions) are mingled with the written (Jenkins, 2015; Mauranen & Vetchinnikova, 2021). Apart from the development of interactional platforms, according to Jacquemet (2011), different countries currently tend towards multilingual societies in which people from highly diverse linguacultural backgrounds come into contact. However, this trend does not necessarily lead to communication breakdowns, particularly when English becomes a global means of intercultural exchanges (Mauranen & Vetchinnikova, 2021; Jenkins et al., 2011). The focus of IS only on miscommunication and misinterpretations is thus incongruous with previous ELF research. Lastly, although Interactional Sociolinguistics has already broadened its scope to the analysis of wider interactional ecology, it overlooks the fact that successful intercultural interactions are a collaborative process between two parties, both native and non-native

English interlocutors rather than placing the burden on non-native ones (Rampton, 2017) which, in this case, are those for whom English is not their mother tongue. That is, Gumperz (1982) seems to focus on the misuse of intonation patterns by the Indian staff in his study instead of a lack of accommodation skills and intercultural awareness of the native speakers.

To gain insight into ELF interactional mechanisms and the factors determining interpretive processes, the interactional ecology of particular speech events needs to be clearly specified. Despite the fact that Interactional Sociolinguistics can effectively explain the influences of speakers' linguacultural backgrounds on contextualisation cue framing and situated inferences, an early IS approach to intercultural communication has been criticised for its limited scope in detailing internal microstructures and its unbalanced focus on instances of intercultural miscommunication. Kasper and Omori (2010) argue that even when speech events comprise speakers from the same linguistic and sociocultural background, interactional difficulties still exist. They further contend that an emphasis only on intercultural miscommunication is intrinsically biased and demonstrates ignorance of instances of successful inter-ethnic interaction. Besides, apart from contextualisation cues, other factors, such as issues of social power relations, ideologies and prejudicial attitudes, can also determine the way interactants frame their presuppositions and how these affect their situated inferences as well as their communicative successes.

Conclusion

To understand the complexity of ELF interactions, it is necessary to give a detailed description of the interactional contexts in which meaning is linguistically, socially and culturally constructed. With its emphasis on using multiple research methods and a multifaceted analysis of the issues raised by language, social context, contextualisation conventions, and the participants' demographic details, Interactional Sociolinguistics, according to Schiffrin (1996) and Canagarajah (2020), provides encompassing insights into how interpretations and situated inferences in dynamic, adaptive and emergent interactions, especially where a common language is used, can be drawn. Further, because of a widely held belief that intercultural encounters abound with misunderstandings and communication breakdowns, and that most studies adopting IS seem to

reveal such phenomena (Kasper & Omori, 2010), the use of Interactional Sociolinguistics in ELF studies will likely extend its analytical boundaries to include successful intercultural interactions, rather than restrict itself to communication clashes. Together with the aforementioned factors, Interactional Sociolinguistics thus becomes a toolbox for a better understanding of the ways in which ELF communicators manage to achieve their mutual understanding and interactional purposes in highly varied linguacultural environments.

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