Translingual Practices of Foreign Friendship Talks in ELF: A Discourse-Analytic Approach

Abstract

Recent studies have described the use of English as a *lingua franca* (ELF) as a type of translingual practices to negotiate meanings, resist neoliberal ideologies, and reconfigure speech norms, reflecting the normality of multilingual speakers' language use. However, little is known about the ways ELF speakers resolve misinterpretation involving loanwords, culturally-specific locutions, creative wordplay, and individual idiolects. Accordingly, this paper aims to examine how ELF speakers avoid the misinterpretation of alien and idiosyncratic utterances in intercultural communication. A total of 30 international professionals were interviewed via a semi-structured post-pragmatic interview method conducted in 2021-2023. According to the data analysis, the concept of supra-understanding is proposed to explicate how ELF speakers develop a critical sociolinguistic awareness of ethnocentric language usages and worldviews. Finally, a revised approach to Deardorff's process model is proposed to integrate supra-understanding into the development of intercultural communicative competence in the use of ELF.

Keywords: translingual practices; translanguaging; intercultural communication; supra-understanding; ELF

1. Whose intelligibility to whom?

The intelligibility of nonnative and nonstandard speakers of English has long been assessed by the degree to which their speech conforms to standard English, which is often associated with General American English (GAE) or Received Pronunciation (RP). However, the preconception that native English speakers are the arbiters of intelligibility is made untenable by the fact that the use of ELF in intercultural communication mainly occurs between nonnative English speakers, without the presence of native speakers. Scholars of world Englishes and intercultural communication assert that it is inappropriate to regard the nonnative and nonstandard use of English as deficient when compared with the standard forms of English because such a unilateral assessment of intelligibility fails to address the mutual intelligibility between groups of nonnative English speakers (Holmes & Dervin, 2016; Jenkins, Cogo, & Dewey, 2011; Kachru & Smith, 2008; Wolf, 2008).

Many scholars have also remarked that the English language spoken worldwide has never been a homogeneous entity, such that no one nation or group can rightfully claim an exclusive right to determine how it should be spoken (Batziakas, 2017;

Holmes & Dervin, 2016; Jenkins, 2015; Jenkins et al., 2018; Mauranen, 2018). If a locution sounds different from the way you speak, it is very likely because it has evolved to fit another linguistic ecosystem; speakers talk with the diction necessary to describe their life experiences with their fellow nationals, community ingroups, or ethnic members (Katz, 2012). Therefore, it should not be assumed that only native speakers of English are qualified as the sole arbitrators to evaluate the intelligibility of English used in intercultural communication.

While native speakerism may no longer be the dominant paradigm in international interaction, it is still necessary to adopt an alternative approach to facilitating mutual understanding between speakers from diverse backgrounds. Over the past three decades, scholars of world Englishes have demonstrated the great variation of English in a range of contexts. Such flexibility promotes communication in a multilingual country, but it also poses challenges in the actual use of English as a *lingua franca* (ELF) for global communication (Holmes & Dervin, 2016; Jenkins, 2015). For example, since GAE is the preferred model in East Asia (Hu, 2005; Yang & Cheng, 2017), whereas RP is preferred in Europe (Marr, 2005; Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006), learners of GAE often have difficulty understanding RP speakers, and vice versa. This difficulty might also extend to other English varieties used around the world (Kachru, 1985; Yang & Cheng, 2017).

Considerable research has examined the intelligibility of nonstandard and nonnative speakers of English. Smith (1992) defines intelligibility as a function of word recognition, and contrasts it with two other terms: comprehensibility and interpretability. Comprehensibility is the extent to which the literal meaning of a statement is understood by others, and is similar to Austin's (1962) concept of locutionary force. By contrast, interpretability is the extent to which the intended meaning of a statement is understood by others, equivalent to Austin's (1962) illocutionary force. In brief, intelligibility is on the word level, comprehensibility is on the sentence level, and interpretability is on the discourse level. Dictation has long been used to investigate intelligibility and comprehensibility, whereas the interpretability of a statement may be attained by contextual clues. However, a critical sociolinguistic awareness is needed to parse and disambiguate the socio-cultural connotations underlying a particular usage.

Numerous studies have also found that intelligibility is influenced by such factors as manner of speaking (Smith, 1992), general linguistic proficiency (Pihko, 1997; Yam, 2005), age (Burda, 2000), kinetic cues (Bara, 1992), and dialectal differences (Smith & Bisazza, 1982; Labov, 2007). It is noteworthy that people who have negative attitudes towards language variation tend to perform below average in word identification tasks and tend to overstate the unintelligibility of English speakers with ethnic, regional, or

national accents other than their own (Preston, 1996; Lindemann, 2001; Kachi, 2004; Scales et al., 2006; Pennycook, 2010; Wajnryb, 2008). Consequently, it sometimes happens that difficulty in understanding an unfamiliar accent is not so much a reflection of the speaker's actual intelligibility, as a reflection of the listener's impatience with a nonnative accent, or accent discrimination (Lippi-Green, 2012).

2. Mutual understanding in ELF

Although the ideal of linguistic homogeneity is often promoted for the sake of pedagogical convenience, this linguistic standard does not reflect the actual use of English around the world, and fails to prepare students for real-world international communication. In the authentic use of English, there exists a wide gap between standards and realities in interethnic and international interaction (Chang, 2022; Ke, 2018). Batziakas (2017) remarks, "the fact that English gradually became the default *lingua franca* in ethnolinguistically diverse contexts point to the need to reinvestigate how English is nowadays used" (p. 44).

Mutual comprehension actually entails a complex interplay of listener and speaker variables. In one of the earliest studies examining mutual intelligibility among nonnative English speakers, Bansal (1969) investigated the extent to which Indian speakers of English are intelligible to non-Indians, by having both native and nonnative speakers repeat or write down recorded sentences or single words. He found that Indian speakers were approximately 70% intelligible to people from other countries. Interestingly, in a qualitative study using interviews and word-for-word dictation tasks, Kachi (2004) found that Indians tend to feel irritated by the choppiness of the English typically spoken by Japanese, whereas Chinese tend to consider Japanese-accented English more intelligible, because they generally find it familiar. These findings suggest that tolerance towards and familiarity with other varieties of English influences one's performance on a word identification task.

Furthermore, studies have indicated that shared L1 backgrounds and extensive exposure to a particular accent improves one's ability to understand utterances in one's own accent (Smith & Bisazza, 1982; Seidlhofer, 2004; Bolton, 2006; Kirkpatrick, 2007). In particular, the use of ELF for effective international communication relies not only on knowledge of the linguistic characteristics of one's interlocutors, but also on respect for their socio-cultural identities and their distinctive ways of speaking (McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008). Put simply, the key to the effective use of ELF in intercultural communication is linguacultural sensitivity towards different ways of speaking.

Understanding distinct varieties of English can expand our sociolinguistic repertoires, allowing us to swiftly and effectively adapt to distinctive expressions in intercultural interaction. Knowledge of English variation need not conflict with the

acquisition of standard English for academic purposes; rather, it prepares English speakers, native and nonnative alike, for the use of English in actual communication (Baker, 2015; Park et al., 2017; Taguchi & Ishiharaluu, 2018; Xu, 2018). In this regard, Sewell (2016) emphasizes that "patient listening" is critical when one uses ELF in international communication, where how to listen matters more than how to speak (p. 81). He further adds, "Speakers and listeners both have roles to play in establishing intelligibility" (p. 81). He asserts that students need to become conscious of "the effects of linguistic variation in their own lives, while developing a critical orientation towards prevailing language attitudes" (p. 182).

A recent upsurge in academic research has shifted from how the proficiency levels of nonnative speakers of English affect their academic and social lives, to how they use their semiotic resources to clarify their intentions and to negotiate their identities (Canagarajah, 2017; Chang, 2022; Vallejo & Dooly, 2020). ELF has recently been reconceptualized as a multilingual franca (Jenkins, 2018). This strand of research recognizes the use of English in intercultural communication as a type of translingual practices (TP), transcending not only the boundaries between national languages (Otheguy et al., 2015), but also the demarcations between languages or other semiotic repertoires that multilingual speakers strategically select and flexibly assemble to achieve mutual understanding (Canagarajah, 2017). In a broader sense, ELF can also be regarded as a form of "translanguaging" (García & Li, 2014), "multisemiotics" (Creese & Blackledge, 2015), or "metrolingualism" (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015). This terminological profusion reveals a Baktinian sense of heteroglossia in the regard that multilinguals strategically and creatively coordinate their semiotic resources in sundry modes according to their occasions and interlocutors, including extralinguistic modes and meaning-carrying paralinguistic modes, making use of such resources as gestures, postures, texts, pictures, and songs (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Kusters et al. 2017). In brief, the trans-semiotic nature of TP allocates language as only one of many available repertories and resources for communication.

A host of scholars have examined word-level intelligibility, sentence-level comprehensibility, and discourse-level interpretability in an effort to determine how ELF speakers draw on their semiotic resources in particular contexts to resolve linguacultural differences in meaning-making processes. However, such strategies as speech accommodation and resorting to contextual clues often fail to bring mutual comprehension in a context containing unfamiliar loanwords, culturally-specific locutions, creative wordplay, or individual idiolects. With this understanding of English variation worldwide, and in light of the frequent difficulty in reaching effective communication in terms of intelligibility, comprehensibility, or interpretability, in this paper the concept of *supra-understanding* is proposed to describe the deconstructive

realization of the misinterpretation which results from ethnocentric ways of speaking and thinking.

This concept cannot be examined by using dictation, which previous studies have used to investigate word-level intelligibility and sentence-level comprehensibility. Additionally, it often happens that one's misinterpretation can only be clarified by being informed of the socio-cultural background and by deconstructing one's ethnocentric mindset. To illustrate how supra-understanding works, five anecdotes are extracted from eight of the thirty professionals in the semi-structured post-pragmatic interviews conducted in 2021 and 2023, all aged between 29 and 40; each was asked to describe a situation in which he or she resolved a misunderstanding caused by linguacultural differences, and to reflect on what he or she had learned from the interaction. A discourse-analytic approach was used to scrutinize their experiences and opinions. Despite occurring in different contexts, their anecdotes all included the use of a culturally specific locution or idiolectal diction that gave rise to misinterpretation, which was exacerbated by an ethnocentric outlook. Table 1 shows the backgrounds of the eight participants from the extracted anecdotes.

Table 1. Participants' backgrounds (All of the informants' names are pseudonyms.)

No.	Name	Gender	Nationality	Native language	Professional background
1	Pat	M	Indian	Malayalam & Hindi	Professor
2	Jim	M	Taiwan	Mandarin	Professor
3	Joe	M	Australia	Australian English	Senior high school teacher
4	Ann	F	South Africa	South African English	Research assistant
5	Sara	F	China	Mandarin	Research assistant
6	Jordan	M	Taiwan	Mandarin	Teaching assistant
7	Ben	M	Japan	Japanese	Research assistant
8	Han	M	Korea	Korean	Teaching assistant

The concept of supra-understanding is meant to awaken us to a type of misinterpretation in TP caused by ethnocentric norms and standards. The phenomenon of TP is nothing new, but rather "the 'always already' of how language works in social practice," as pointed out by Canagarajah (2017, p. 8). It is a translanguaing approach to exploring how multilinguals acquire a new language or develop communicative competence that is new, defying monolingual habitus, ideologies, and standards. In reality, speakers deploy their full semiotic repertoires in interaction with their

interlocutors to negotiate meanings and achieve communicative objectives (Lee & Dovchin, 2020). Furthermore, there is also a need to explore how interlocutors from diverse backgrounds resolve misunderstanding to attain mutual comprehension in TP. The concept of supra-understanding enables us to explore how multilinguals disambiguate ethnocentric misinterpretation and gain an understanding of the linguacultural connotations underlying different ways of speaking. The five anecdotes presented below were extracted from face-to-face interviews focusing on foreign friendship talks. Despite the different contexts, each anecdote illustrates how the participant engaged in a meaning-making process to resolve misinterpretation, thereby extending our understanding of ELF in intercultural communication.

3. Five anecdotes illustrating supra-understanding

Anecdote 1: *It's made by chili, not curry.*

Pat, a visiting scholar from India, said that he once invited his Taiwanese friend Tom, also a visiting scholar in America, for dinner at his apartment. He cooked some rice, vegetables, and soup. Like most Indians, Pat likes very spicy food, but the dishes he prepared for Tom were much milder than those he usually makes for himself. He said that Tom was surprised by the reddish-brown color of the soup, having long associated Indian food with the yellow color of turmeric powder, and he instantly realized his misconception.

Then Tom asked Pat to recommend some curry powder, since he wanted to try to cook this interesting dish himself. But when he asked Pat about the curry powder used in India, Pat said, "It's made by chili, not curry," feeling puzzled about what he wanted.

Tom was also confused at the moment, and tried to clarify his question by saying that Indian food is very popular in Taiwan, where curry powder and curry cubes are widely used in soups, rice dishes, and vegetable dishes. In addition to this explanation, Tom also showed some images of curry powder products found online. Pat finally realized that Tom was using the word 'curry' in its Western sense of a ready-made mixture of spices typically used in Indian cuisine.

Beginning to understand, Tom sought further clarification. He asked Pat if 'spice' and 'chili' mean the same thing in India. Pat replied that chili is a particular type of spice, and that there are various types of chili, such as red and green. He showed to Tom a box of spices he had in his kitchen; he also added that they might also use *masala,* a mixture of spices, often including red chili and turmeric, ground into a powder or paste, and usually differentiated by the dominant spice, e.g., *tikka masala* or *garam masala*. He then realized that Tom was asking about *masala,* not curry powder.

Pat also told Tom that the reddish-brown 'soup' is actually a popular south Indian dish called *sambar,* and that it typically contains vegetables and lentils. Its spicy and

slightly sour taste comes from the tamarind that is always included. Indians usually use *sambar* as a dip when eating white rice cakes called *idli*, or with a big, thin pancake called a *dosa*. The special spice mix used for making *sambar* is called *sambar masala*. Pat used some online images to explain these special Indian dishes, so that Tom could learn more about Indian cuisine.

Pat later recommended a local Indian grocery store, and they went there together. When they saw several brands of curry powder on the shelf, Pat felt a little bit embarrassed. Pat said to Tom with a smile, "Well then, now it will be convenient for you to make a quick curry dish."

Pat also added that Tom later told him that the Google dictionary defines curry powder as a mixture of finely ground spices. Regarding this conversation, Pat noted:

> *The phrase 'curry powder' still sounds strange to me, but I realize it actually exists in the West, even though it's unfamiliar to most Indians. From our conversation, I came to find various English usages, which might be totally different from the way we speak English in India.*

In fact, the word *curry* originates from Tamil, a language spoken in southern India, and means a dish cooked in an Indian-style sauce, typically served with rice. However, outside of India, the term *curry powder*, refers to a premade mixture of spices typically used in Indian cuisine.

This anecdote illustrates a case of what I call supra-understanding: realizing that one's habitual way of thinking has caused one to misinterpret the intended meaning of a particular expression. In this anecdote, both Pat and Tom deconstructed their language ideologies, and expanded their understanding by re-deploying their semiotic repertoires in multimodal ways. In a deconstructive process of collaborative learning, they eventually came to realize their linguacultural differences, thereby enhancing their mutual understanding.

This scenario highlights the importance of deconstructing enthnocentrism, as it awakens us to a dynamic process of meaning negotiation that transcends our linguacultural locutions in intercultural communication. The use of ELF in this way requires a critical sociolinguistic awareness of TP, so as to mitigate the misinterpretation which inevitably arises between speakers from different backgrounds.

Anecdote 2: *It's called jerk chicken, a special barbecue chicken.*

Jim, a professor from Taiwan, was taken aback when he saw jerk chicken on a menu in the food court of a shopping mall in Kingston, the capital city of Jamaica, where he was conducting fieldwork for his doctoral research. His Jamaican friend Eric strongly

recommended this dish, yet Jim couldn't help but feel confused and embarrassed, since to him the word *jerk* is a pejorative word used to describe somebody whose behavior one strongly disapproves of. He said, at that time, he was thinking: "Why would such a derogative word be used as the name of the dish?" Unsure what to make of it, he asked his friend to explain.

Realizing his puzzlement, Eric told Jim, "*It's called jerk chicken, a special barbecue chicken.*" He explained that jerk chicken is a type of sun-dried chicken coated with a spicy pimento marinade and grilled over a wood fire of pimento wood, which creates its distinctive smoky flavor. The essential ingredient of the barbecue seasoning is pimentos, which look like small-sized red bell peppers, but they taste like a mixture of peppers and cinnamon. This combination of many aromatic flavors is why ground pimentos are called allspice. In addition to his oral explanation, Eric also used some images to illustrate ingredients like pimentos and cinnamon.

After Eric's explanation, Jim tried the dish for himself and found it very savory but not so spicy. He thanked Eric for his recommendation, and later on he asked Eric why the word *jerk* was used for the dish. Eric frankly responded that he had no idea, but he guessed that it might refer to some kind of twisting action used by the cook to make the meat soft and chewy. Jim later went online to search for the origins of the dish, and found that the word *jerk* is thought to come from the Spanish word *charqui*, meaning dried strips of meat, similar to what we now call beef jerky and pork jerky.

But why is this way of preparing meat? Jim's explanation is summarized below. British slave-traders began bringing African slaves to Jamaica during the early seventeenth century to work on plantations producing sugar, coffee, cocoa, pimento, and other crops. According to historians, by the time the British arrived in Jamaica, the indigenous Arawak people had already been inhabiting the island for over 2,500 years, and continued living in the mountainous regions of the interior. Whenever African slaves managed to escape from captivity, they also sought refuge in the mountains, living either amongst or nearby the Arawak tribespeople, who possibly showed them how to prepare meat in this fashion.

Jim also found that jerk chicken is a traditional Jamaican delicacy, especially favored for celebratory meals. In addition to pimentos, the marinade also includes garlic, green onions, and very hot Scotch bonnet peppers. The dried meat is soaked in this marinade for at least six hours and then slowly cooked over a pimento wood fire. While pork was originally used, chicken later became the most popular meat for jerk. Furthermore, Jim later found that jerk seasoning and marinades are also available in American supermarkets. Recalling this misinterpretation, he observed:

> *It seems that I'm not alone misinterpreting 'jerk chicken' in a derogative way; my American friend, Ashley, also told me her similar confusion when she went to a restaurant in Florida with her father when she was a teenager…. My American friend, Pat, also said that he felt curious about the dish when he saw that in a food court. After he tasted it, he found it very delicious…. I think those who are unfamiliar with Jamaican cooking tend to misinterpret jerk chicken…. It's interesting that my Jamaican friend didn't know the origin of jerk chicken. I told him later and he was happy to learn more about their traditional delicacy.*

In fact, Jamaican jerky is similar to the distinctive South African *biltong*, a Dutch word for lean meat which is salted and dried in strips (D'Amat et at., 2013). Such culturally specific loanwords are common in ELF, particularly when speaking about a concept peculiar to a particular sociocultural group. It is natural for ELF speakers to use loanwords and to develop new lexical terms to express diverse thoughts, norms, and lifestyles. For example, a Nigerian might use 'go-slow' for traffic jam, a semantic translation from the indigenous way of speaking (Babarinde & Ahamefula, 2020). Likewise, a Chinese might use 'outside grandmother' to refer to one's maternal grandmother, reflecting a literal translation from the mother tongue (Fang, 2019).

Speaking of barbecue, Americans usually grill meat on a grate directly over hot charcoal, and American barbecuing is usually a slow process, using indirect heat or smoke, with the coals pushed to the sides or at a distance from the grate, so that it is a type of roasting. By contrast, the British barbecue is usually a fast cooking process done directly over high heat, similar to American broiling (Bawdon, 2018).

Each American state might have a preferred kind of meat and distinctive barbecue sauce. For example, in Texas, beef is most popular barbecue meat, while in Kentucky people prefer mutton. Additionally, it is said that eastern North Carolina uses a vinegar-based sauce, whereas in Kentucky they typically coat the meat with dry seasonings—the so-called 'dry rub' technique.[1]

In addition, Joe, a senior high school teacher from Australia, said that in his country the most commonly used BBQ techniques are smoking, roasting, and grilling. An Australian BBQ is usually an outdoor social gathering, often referred to informally as a *barbie*, though this locution sometimes confuses foreigners who might wonder why grownups would want to get together and play with dolls. Australian English has long been well-known for its use of such amusing diminutives as "arvo" for afternoon,

[1] The general information about different barbecue styles is available on Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barbecue#cite_ref-GBC_1-0

"bickie" for biscuit, and "Goldie" for Gold Coast (Luu, 2018; Sussex, 2004). Regarding the Aussie predilection for 'strine,' he remarked:

> *We're fond of shortening words. We just find it fun to play with words and shorten long words. Long words are usually shortened; names are also shortened, like Pat for Patrick and Joe for Jordan. This shows Australian laid-back lifestyle and intimate friendship, but foreigners might find it offended. So I try not to use this practice to my foreign friends. But when they notice my simplified words, I'll explain and that usually brings smiles. …I also found, many Australian colleges have begun to provide their foreign students with leaflets explaining many of the peculiarities of Australian English. This can help avoid the potential misinterpretation of local slang.*

Ann, a doctoral student from South Africa, said that they use 'braai' instead of barbecue, a loanword from the Dutch word *braden*, meaning 'to grill.' Few foreigners understand the word, not to mention this distinctive cooking method. Regarding this distinctive word, Ann noted:

> *Whenever I tell my foreign friends local grilling is called braai, they usually feel puzzled and wonder how braai is different from barbecue. So I have learned to understand the differences and explain…. Typically we cook wild game over open coals, rather than on a gas grill. We braai just about anything, anywhere, rain or shine! The fire remains lit after the food is cooked, and everyone gathers around the fire for a social gathering. That can last for hours. Regardless of language, race, or culture, braai is all about having a good time and catching up with friends.*

Ann also added that they have National Braai Day on September 24, which South Africa designated in 2005 to encourage all South Africans to unite around fires for a multicultural celebration.

All this goes to show that the various names and techniques used for grilling reflect a nation's unique cultural and linguistic history. Without a critical sociolinguistic awareness, ELF interactants might be trapped by their own ethnocentric locutions and conventions, failing to understand and appreciate each other's linguacultural differences.

Anecdote 3: ***It's called a down coat, not a feather coat.***

Sara, a research assistant from China, shared her experience about the time she asked her American friend Larry to recommend 'a feather coat.' Sara found her phrase was misleading because Larry thought that she was thinking about dressing up as a bird for Halloween, but in fact she was actually planning to buy a coat to keep her warm in winter. She further explained that she wanted a lightweight coat stuffed with feathers, and she also used some online images to clarify the clothes she wanted to buy. Larry came to realize that she was not talking about a *feather* coat, but rather a *down* coat.

Larry said to Sara, "It's called a down coat, not a feather coat." He patiently explained that to Americans, her phrase might be taken as expressing a coat with feathers. Accordingly, if an American hears the odd-sounding term 'feather coat,' he or she is likely to associate it with some kind of costume with feathers, to be worn for a party or performance. But Sara was confused about why such a coat would be called *down* instead of *up*, seeing that it looked so puffy. Larry was not sure why, so he went online and found out that the word *down* refers to the tiny feathers that birds have under their wings and close to their bodies. Larry added that *down* is also used to fill 'comforters' (Larry's word, typically used in North America, meaning quilts). In short, one can only know what is meant by the phrase 'down coat' by first understanding that 'down' is a type of stuffing. Regarding this misunderstanding, Sara noted:

> *I used "feather coat" because I didn't know if there was a special term for the type of clothes I was looking for. So I translated it directly from the Chinese name: Yurong Yi. I was actually aware my word might be wrong. It's embarrassing, and it's better to ask, instead of thinking he might understand it.*

Jordan, a Taiwanese teaching assistant while working on his doctoral research, also shared a similar story. One time he would like to ask his American friend, Henry, to recommend 'a heating fan,' but Henry couldn't understand what he was asking about, and he thought it was a joke or a riddle. Jordan realized that his literal translation of the Chinese name of the appliance (*Dian-Re Shan*) was misleading, so he explained that he was talking about a fan-shaped device that generates heat to make a room warm in winter. Henry then realized that Jordan wanted a space heater, a name that reflects its function, rather than its appearance.

Like nonnative speakers of English, who might have idiolectal expressions, children also tend to invent words to describe something new or unfamiliar. For

instance, a young child might say “happy birthday fires” for “birthday candles,” or might call a garden trampoline a “bounce-a-line.” Other examples are as follows:[2]

bus-train for tram
hanitizer for sanitizer
rainbrella for umbrella
food map for recipe
boat coat for life jacket
bowl with holes for colander

In many cases, kids use creative and logical linguistic shortcuts that make more sense than the intended expressions.

Adults also engage in this kind of creative linguistic behavior, particularly when talking with close family members and friends. Jordan recalled his American friend Henry saying ‘dumb waiter’ for a food elevator’ as well as a speed bump or a speed hump. Anecdotes like these reveal that, like native speakers of English, ELF speakers are creative language users, deploying their native language usages, together with other semiotic resources, to negotiate meanings. ‘Peculiar’ expressions like ‘feather coat’ and ‘heating fan’ are sprinkled through TP. Albeit strange sounding to native ears, they might be regarded as a form of linguistic creativity, instead of mother-tongue interference. Multilinguals often use their multiple semiotic repertories in multimodal ways to make themselves understood in a particular situation, and the resulting ambiguities can add some humor and spice to life (Katz, 2012).

In a similar scenario, Ben, a research assistant from Japan, said that one time his American roommate, John, asked for a paper towel when they were cooking in the kitchen. Unsure what he was asking for, Ben replied if he wanted “a kitchen towel.” John corrected him, saying “It’s a paper towel, not a kitchen towel.” Then Ben asked him why Americans say toilet paper instead of toilet tissue, and paper towel instead of kitchen towel. After all, since it is generally used in the kitchen to wipe up liquids on the table or countertop, wouldn’t it be more logical to call it a kitchen towel, on analogy with toilet paper. John explained that a paper towel could be used anywhere in the house, not just the kitchen. But, when Ben reasoned that toilet paper could also be used in anywhere, John had to admit that it was a matter of established usage, rather than logical consistency.

Interestingly enough, Ben later found from the Cambridge dictionary that in Great Briton three terms are used to refer to the same thing: kitchen towel, kitchen paper, and

[2] More examples of children’s invented words are available on this website: https://www.someecards.com/news/news/30-words-invented-kids-dictionary/

kitchen roll. To Ben, kitchen paper sounds informal, whereas kitchen towel sounds more formal. However, John thinks of a kitchen towel as a rag used to wash dishes. Such discussions, albeit tedious, are sometimes necessary for facilitating a long-term cross-cultural communication. Likewise, this case also indicates that a critical sociolinguistic awareness is needed to avoid miscommunication caused by ethnocentric diction, so that speech accommodation can resume. Regarding this naming difference, Ben noted:

> *It's interesting to find different names for the same object. After that, he [John] didn't argue with me any more. He still uses paper towel, while I mix different names, but I became aware that Americans use paper towel, not kitchen towel or kitchen paper. All of these different names are fine to me if everyone involved in a conversation can understand them. We might speak differently, but we can keep a sense of humor to add to the spice of life.*

Anecdote 4: *We call it a biscuit, not a scone.*

Han, a teaching assistant from Korea, said that when he came to America, he went to a seafood restaurant with his American friend Bill. Han said that he enjoyed the main dish, as well as the salty buns that came with it. When Bill referred to them as biscuits, he began to feel confused. To Han, these didn't look like biscuits at all. To him, biscuits are thin, sweet crackers, eaten as a snack or dessert. He said to Bill that the 'biscuits' looked like baked buns and scones. Bill replied, "We call it a biscuit, not a scone." When Bill explained what is meant by a biscuit in America, Han realized that he understood the word *biscuit* in the British way.

Then Han talked with Bill about different names of desserts. Han said that in general, British biscuits are American cookies, but in Britain, they also make a type of round, soft and chewy cookie, usually big and sweet, with some chocolate chips and nuts on the surface. Amongst the popular types of biscuits in the UK are wedding biscuits, which are generally small and variously shaped. In this regard, the bride and groom in Taiwan typically give a box of wedding biscuits to each guest after the wedding banquet. Bill told Han that Americans don't use biscuits in that way; he said that the wedding biscuits are similar to American shortbread cookies.

Bill also added that crackers are popular snacks in America, and are typically topped with butter, cheese, fruit, chocolate, or nuts. However, to most British people, the word *cracker* is associated with a party favor which is used to celebrate Christmas and other festivals. What is known in America is called a party popper, which includes a series of paper cylinders that are pulled apart at Christmas or other celebrations to make a sharp noise and get small toys inside.

Another similar example is pudding. Han also noticed that American pudding usually has a thick and creamy texture, and comes in many different flavors, such as chocolate, vanilla, banana, and pumpkin. Nonetheless, he associated pudding with a kind of caramel custard, which looks like the Spanish dessert called *flan*. To complicate matters further, the British use pudding as a general word for dessert. Accordingly, pudding contains various ingredients to different people.

Likewise, some English words might also be appropriated and nativized to have different meanings in another language. The Japanese might regard 'milk' (*miruku*) as only powdered milk, and 'service' (sabisu) as a complimentary gift to a customer in a Japanese restaurant (Scherling, 2016). In Taiwan Mandarin, the loanword 'toast' (*tusi*) means a loaf of bread. As a result, the same object may have different names, and the same word may refer to different objects in other cultures. ELF speakers from diverse cultures often use their distinct varieties and nativized usages unconsciously; accordingly, vigilance is needed to avoid the ethnocentric interpretations which impede the understanding of linguacultural usages.

Anecdote 5: *It's football, not soccer.*

Football is also an interesting example. Ann mentioned that her Spanish friend Allan is always correcting her South African usage, insisting, "It's football, not soccer." Ann could never understand how the same sport could have such different names, but instead of arguing about it with Allan, they agreed to put their lexical difference aside, and simply enjoyed watching the online matches together. In fact, what the British call football is called soccer in North America and South Africa. British football was originally called association football, which was shortened to "assoc" or "soc," and then transformed into the slang term "soccer," which eventually fell out of favor in the UK, but was retained in North America, South Africa, and elsewhere.[3] After being informed about the origins of the two different names, Allan still adhered to his usage, but he did not correct her again.

Additionally, American football is more like British rugby, but each team has 11 players, instead of 15. Furthermore, the ball used in American football is oblong, while a rugby ball is round. Perhaps the most obvious difference is that American football players wear protective gear, but rugby players don't. Moreover, rugby teams compete in international leagues, but American football is limited to North America.[4] Again, the same word has different meanings in different countries.

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[3] The general information about soccer is available on Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Association_football

[4] The general information about American football is available on Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Association_football

Ann also mentioned that in South Africa a traffic light is called a ‘robot,’ which is often confusing to foreigners. Similarly, in Nigeria, a ‘machine’ is used in place of a motorcycle (Babarinde & Ahamefula, 2020). Amongst the many examples of this phenomenon in the English-speaking world are the following differences between British and American English: *lorry* for *truck*, *trainers* for *sneakers*, *litter* for *trash*, and *lift* for *elevator*. Below are a few more examples of different English usages:

- In Kohler, Wisconsin, *bubbler* is used for drinking fountain.
- In Australia, *chockie bickie* is used informally for chocolate biscuit, *firie* for fire fighter, and *Macca’s* for McDonald’s.
- In South Africa, *sis* means disgusting, and; *ya* means yes.
- In Jamaica, *yaman* means yes sir or yes ma’am.
- In Japan, *sando* refers to sandwich.

Using such words when speaking with a foreigner tends to cause misunderstanding, but the in-group speakers might be unconscious that these words might be misinterpreted by out-group speakers, hence resulting in confusion or even argument. In an ELF context, such instances are common, as summarized below:

An Indian speaker claims:
It’s chili, not curry.

A Jamaican claims:
It’s jerk chicken, not barbecued chicken.

A Brit claims:
It’s football, not soccer.

An American claims:
It’s a biscuit, not a scone.

A Wisconsinite claims:
It’s a bubbler, not a drinking fountain.

A native of the American South claims:
It’s pop, not soda.

A complete list would be very long, demonstrating the lexical diversity of ELF. Nonetheless, people tend to believe that their norms are correct, even when sociolinguistic data show that this is not the case. Understanding different ways of speaking may not necessarily lead to a pleasant experience. The key to effective intercultural communication lies in not only the deconstruction of one's own language usages and worldviews, but also collaborative learning of each other's differences for meaningful interaction. In addition to respect for differences, a curious, modest, open-minded, and egalitarian attitude towards these oddities of ELF will go a long way in making our intercultural interactions more rewarding, educational, and intriguing.

4. Dynamics of supra-understanding

Theoretically speaking, the anecdotes presented above are difficult to fit into the extant three categories of mutual understanding in intercultural communication: intelligibility, comprehensibility, and interpretability. The concept of supra-understanding is one level higher than interpretability, and refers to the deconstructive realization that one's habitual way of speaking and thinking has caused one to assume that others understand a particular locution in the same way it is understood by oneself.

Sewell's (2016) four-quadrant model of linguistic variation is helpful to understand how language use reflects speech functions. In this model, Quadrant 1 represents a speaker's habitual or natural way of speaking with fellow locals, while Quadrant 2 represents the degree of language shift that the speaker is able to make for the sake of mutual intelligibility when speaking with those from different backgrounds. In contrast, Quadrant 3 represents the linguistic features that convey the speaker's identity to outsiders, whereas Quadrant 4 represents the speech norm acceptable in the context. Sewell's (2016) model is shown in Figure 1.

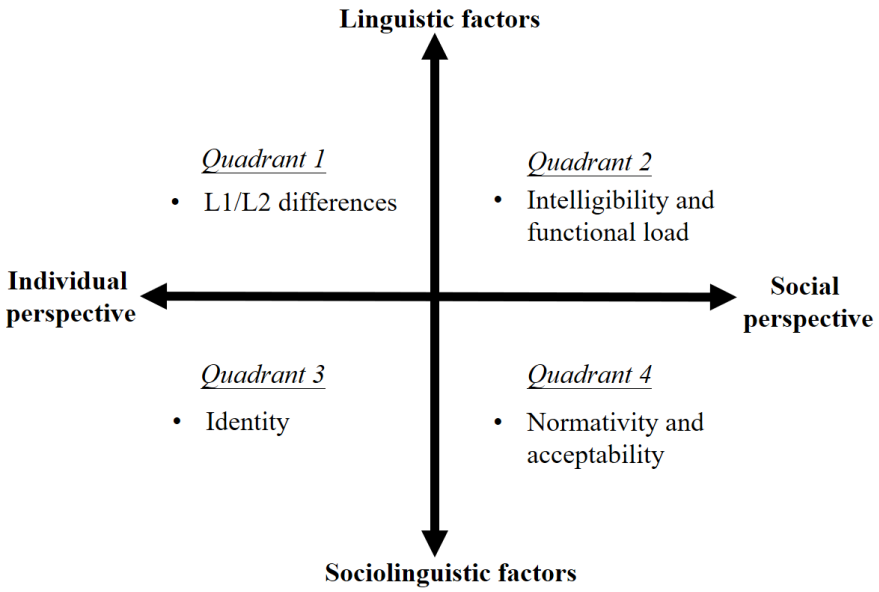

Figure 1. The four-quadrant model of accent variation
(adapted from Sewell, 2016, p. 102)

However, this model cannot fully explain the concept of supra-understanding observed from the scenarios presented in this study. First, supra-understanding might be caused by the existence of differing speech norms, as shown in Quadrant 4, or it might result from L1/L2 differences, as shown in Quadrant 1. On the other hand, supra-understanding might come to an end with mutual understanding in Quadrant 2, or it might be perpetuated in Quadrant 3, if the speaker understands the intended meaning of a particular usage, but chooses to adhere to his or her speech norm or idiolect instead. Moreover, even when mutual speech accommodation occurs in Quadrants 2 and 4, it might go back and forth between these two quadrants, depending on interpersonal relationships and interlocutors' moods. Put simply, supra-understanding operates within the dynamic flow of real-world contexts.

By contrast, Deardorff's (2006) process model is helpful for understanding intercultural communicative competence (ICC). According to this model, ICC comprises affective, cognitive, mental, and behavioral characteristics, with attitudes stressed as fundamental to the development of ICC. Deardorff (2006) distills her participants' responses into three types of attitudes: respect, openness, and curiosity/discovery, commenting, "The development of intercultural competence needs to be recognized as an ongoing process and not a direct result of solely one experience, such as study abroad" (p. 259). In short, ICC is conceptualized as an ongoing process manifested in the four domains, as displayed in Figure 2.

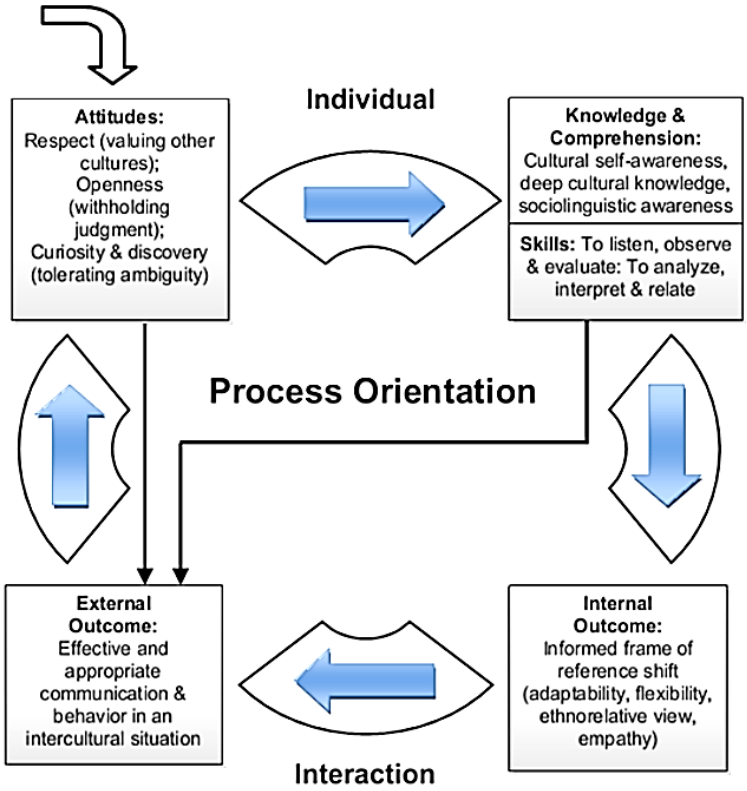

Figure 2. Deardorff's (2006) process model of ICC (p. 16)

In her model, supra-understanding might be regarded as a lack of sociolinguistic knowledge and comprehension. Deardorff (2006) emphasizes awareness of one's own culture in comparison with other cultures. Nevertheless, Mendenhall, Stahl, Ehnert, Oddou, Osland, and Kuhlmann (2004) contend that knowledge alone doesn't necessarily lead to change in behavior and attitude. Moreover, Williams (2005) found that international students expand their ICC only when they actually interact and socialize with locals. For Deardorff (2006), ICC is an ongoing, multifaceted process, rather than the direct result of one particular type of experience, such as overseas study. She stresses that the development of ICC only occurs in conjunction with appropriate attitudes, including respect, openness, and curiosity, and other scholars have emphasized the importance of empathy in the development of ICC (Calloway-Thomas et al., 2017; Deardorff & Ararasatnam-Smith, 2017; Reisinger et al., 2015).

However, Deardorff (2006) only touches on the general attitudes needed to cultivate ICC, without elucidating sociolinguistic awareness of ELF. Furthermore, her model is devoid of critical thinking on the issue of ethnocentric ownership of the English language. Deep knowledge of a culture requires critical cultural awareness (Perry & Southwell, 2011; Talkington et al., 2004), yet knowledge of cultural differences alone doesn't enhance one's ICC. In light of the growing population of nonnative English speakers around the world, there is a pressing need to respond to the

concerns of nonnative speakers regarding national/ethnic identities and self-esteem. However, in addition to respect for different cultures, one also needs to critically examine monolingual ideologies and ethnocentric locutions.

While many scholars have examined ELF practices from the perspective of linguistic and cultural features and differences, other identity markers in intercultural communication might be ignored. Lee (2018) proposes translingual investigation into the alternative epistemologies beyond the conventional paradigm of structuralist analysis. Likewise, Zhu (2019) asserts that intercultural researchers need to investigate "whether and to what extent participants bring about, align with each other, or resist cultural memberships oriented to by themselves or ascribed by others in interactions" (p. 218). Only by deconstructing stereotypical concepts of language and culture will it be possible to develop ICC in cross-cultural encounters on the societal and individual levels, supra-understanding transculturality and translanguaging in the context of ELF (Holmes & Dervin, 2016; McConachy, 2019; Song & Lin, 2020).

In addition, Deardorff's (2006) model reflects a distinctively Western and mostly America-centric perspective, thus overlooking non-Western contexts and the standpoints of such fields as international relations and Asian culture. In East Asian culture, the key to successful interaction is not just communicative efficiency but also interpersonal comity (Huang, 2015, p. 127). Moreover, in some Asian countries, such as Malaysia and Indonesia, religion is regarded as a crucial aspect of interpersonal interaction (Nadeem et al., 2017).

Awareness of supra-understanding is conducive to developing ICC in the context of TP. Misinterpretation often occurs when ELF speakers unconsciously use a culturally-specific word like *robot*, a region-specific word like *bubbler*, a loanword like *braai*, a neologism like *bounce-a-line*, a colloquial word like *barbie*, or an idiosyncratic word like *feather coat*, unaware that others might not understand their socio-cultural or idiolectal connotations. However, such intercultural communication breakdowns can be overcome if one makes an effort to seek clarification, as illustrated in the depictions of the informants' foreign friendship talks. Resolving misinterpretation requires deconstructive reflection on linguacultural locutions and exploration of sociolinguistic variation. For example, when hearing the confusing term "curry powder," an Indian might take the initiative to find out what it means to the speaker, and the speaker might explain this diction when sensing the listener's incomprehension.

This study has shown not only how adept speakers utilized their full semiotic repertoires and multiple modal resources simultaneously in translingual ELF contexts to prioritize mutual understanding over standards and accuracy, but also how they realized their ethnocentric misinterpretations and neoliberal prejudices to appreciate lingualcultural differences. With this understanding, an ICC model needs to embrace a

critical sociolinguistic awareness of contemporarily increasing translingual discourses between multilingual speakers in a context of "superdiversity" (Vertovec, 2007, p. 1025), both in real-physical and virtual-cyber spaces, due to the various linguistic, cultural and social backgrounds of those involved (Kim, 2018). Indeed, ELF as TP poses a challenge for intercultural communication, but it also provides us with a great opportunity to explore, discover, and learn how our own socio-cultural norms and life styles differ from others. Only with curiosity, respect, empathy, critical thinking, and sharing of life experiences, can foreign friendships begin to grow and thrive.

5. Conclusions

This study has shown how ELF speakers resolve misinterpretations to achieve supra-understanding. Like other languages, English is not a homogeneous entity. Given the gap between neolinguistic standards and translingual realities (Danjo, 2021), there is a need to prepare for unpredictable contexts, where speakers might use puzzling locutions (Blommaert, 2013; Canagarajah, 2013; Conteh, 2018; Degano & Kirsch, 2020; García et al. 2017). Accordingly, it is essential to prepare English learners for communicative unpredictability by using multimodal resources in creative and strategic ways to expand their repertoires and develop their communicative competence. Teachers need to demystify the concept of the standard monolingual dogma and implement an inclusive approach, open to the flexible use of TP to facilitate their classroom interactions with multilingual and multicultural students (Cai & Fang, 2022; Ke & Lin, 2017; Zhang & Gau, 2017). A translanguaging pedagogy can empower multilingual students to appropriate a new language, expand their existing repertoires, and cultivate their confidence with self-esteem. Bi-directionality in language socialization not only facilitates classroom interactions between teachers and students from multilingual and multicultural backgrounds, but also expands linguacultural repertories in co-learning processes (Davila, 2020; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2021; Ke, 2016; Lin & Wu, 2022).

In terms of language ideologies, TP in ELF reflects a form of postcolonial translingualism, as elaborated in Canagarajah's (2017) study of skilled migrants' work experiences. Canagarajah (2017) has demonstrated that migrant professionals, while motivated by neoliberal ideologies and socio-economic mobility, strategically deploy semiotic resources to resist dominant ideologies and, in the process, to develop "co-operative dispositions" that enable them to cope effectively in interactions with people from diverse backgrounds, as well as to negotiate meanings and power relations (p. 46). Furthermore, Canagarajah (2017) remarks that translinguality is a strategic transformative practice, which operates to reconfigure the dominant ideologies that appropriate multilingual practices for neoliberal purposes. He encourages us to analyze language use from the perspective of "an expansive translingualism informed by

postcolonial ideologies," as opposed to "a reductive translingualism exploited by neoliberalism" (p. 49). To debunk the engulfing forces of neoliberalism, he asserts,

> *Though monolingualism and uniformity are enforced by gate keepers and the powerful, translingual scholars are optimistic that spaces can be found for variation in the mix of semiotic resources that constitute a text. That monolingual policies are still powerful and suppressive is true. However, they are only policies and ideologies. The diversity that always exists in practice enables multilingual communities to find spaces for voice, renegotiation, and resistance.* (p. 56)

Acquiring standard English as a form of linguistic capital is insufficient (Ke, 2019), and recent research on translanguaging in a cross-cultural setting has indicated that understanding how disctict varieties of English vary in their linguistic structures and socio-cultural ideologies will facilitate mutual comprehension between speaker and listener. Canagarajah's (2017) study has demonstrated that skilled migrants do not rely on standard English, which neoliberalism expects to manage the reality of translingual practices for communicative efficiency at the price of local language loss and multilingual identities; rather, they use "co-operative dispositions" to achieve mutual understanding with others in the workplace; their strategies include comprehension checking, slow speech rate, repetition, clarification, rephrasing, and, most importantly, "willingness to collaborate in meaning making," which favors attentiveness, patience, tolerance, respect, humility, empathy, and reciprocity (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 43).

Nonetheless, speech articulation, contextual clues, and dialogue involvement might not enable interlocutors to figure out 'odd' locutions and novel diction unless one develops a critical awareness of one's own ethnocentric conventions or idiolectal usages in meaning-making processes. The anecdotes presented in this paper indicate that interactants, in addition to curiosity about other cultures, respect for linguistic variation, willingness to share life experiences, and clarification of intention, also developed a deconstructive thinking about their sociolinguistic habitus which might prevent them from exploring the socio-cultural connotations behind different ways of speaking. These anecdotes have demonstrated that it is speech accommodation from others' perspectives that helps to develop an appreciation of linguacultural differences. This study has also presented various semantic features of ELF which cannot be interpreted appropriately in a monolingual English mindset. Future research might examine other ELF features in terms of phonology, syntax, and pragmatics to explore how ELF speakers resolve linguacultural differences to achieve mutual understanding and communicative comity.

Jointly negotiating meaning entails not only a critical thinking of standard English, but also a deconstructive perspective of our own locutions and those used by others in ELF communication, thus enabling us to resolve the confusion caused by ethnocentrism and idiolects, and, at the same time, revealing the socio-cultural implications of particular usages. With a critical sociolinguistic awareness of neoliberalism and ethnocentrism, ELF speakers can achieve the supra-understanding of alien diction by deploying and re-coordinating their entire semiotic repertories in resourceful ways. The informants in this study finally realized that their misinterpretation originated from their conventional or self-centered mindset. Although the scenarios depicted in this study are concerned with causal and daily chitchats about food, clothing, recreation, and transportation, they present a general phenomenon very likely reflecting the use of ELF in intercultural communication. Nonetheless, future research might explore whether these misinterpretations occur in other settings.

It is worth noting that judging other language usages from one's own perspective can be misleading and counterproductive in ELF interactions. As Canagrajah's (2017) asserts, ELF interlocutors need to develop "other-oriented co-operative dispositions," which stress "critical reflexivity on one's own biases and ethical sensitivity not to appropriate the other's words and actions according to one's own frames of reference" (p. 46). The narratives presented in this study have shown the benefits of deconstructive and collaborative learning in ELF communication. It is ineluctable that translingual discourses with foreign friends require patience, empathy, additional information on socio-cultural background, and reflection on one's habitual ways of speaking and thinking, but they can lead to genuine understanding, supportive solidarity, sustained efficiency, dialogical amusement, and interpersonal rapport in the long run. Not until we deconstruct ethnocentric conventions and accommodate various locutions will we be able to facilitate effective intercultural communication, thereby laying the basis for harmonious interactions grounded on well-informed understanding.

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