Lingua Franca English, Code-switching,
and Language Teaching

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Introduction

This paper will look at characteristics of lingua franca English and code-switching. Aspects of each can inform one's approach to teaching English in the classroom. According to Canagarajah (2007), usage of lingua franca English is characterized by its intersubjective construction, suspension of expectations concerning norms, and cooperative orientation. Due to lingua franca English being radically context-dependent and multiform, Canaragajah argued for a strong connection between acquisition and usage. Fotos (2001) identified distinct code-switching patterns in teachers and students. I will focus on her discussion of its usage as a sociolinguistic strategy that creates a sense of community and as a learning strategy that both clarifies input and facilitates the negotiation of meaning in output. After examining aspects of lingua franca English and code-switching, I will look at how they might inform the practice of teaching English.

To set the stage for an examination of the features lingua franca English and code-switching, it is helpful to clarify the terms. Holmes defined the term lingua franca as "a language serving as a regular means of communication between different linguistic groups in a multilingual speech community" (2008, p. 81). A lingua franca may be the native language of one of the groups, although it is often not native to either party. English is an international language of communication. There are multiple acronyms used to describe English as a lingua franca, such as ELF (English as a lingua franca), GEs (Global Englishes), and LFE (lingua franca English). Code-switching is defined as "alternation of two languages within a single discourse, sentence, or constituent" (Poplack, 1980, p. 158). Code-switching occurs when a speaker speaks in one language and switches to another one. The term is also used to cover shifts that occur between speakers. This paper will address the case where language learners shift to their native language during a lesson.

Features of Lingua Franca English

I will now look at three of the characteristics of lingua franca English (LFE) discussed by Canagarajah (2007). First, LFE is intersubjectively constructed by its

users (p. 925). LFE is not a standardized form of communication. Its users negotiate meaning and form. Speakers continually monitor each other's language to adapt their own language to promote intelligibility. LFE usage is fluid and flexible. The intersubjectively-constructed aspect of LFE has implications for assessment. Canagarajah wrote that "we have to judge proficiency, intelligibility, and communicative success in terms of each context and its participants" (p. 927). Using native-speaker communication as a baseline is inappropriate here. Canagarajah aimed to complicate the dichotomy between native speakers and non-native speakers, writing that "all users of LFE have native competence of LFE" (p. 925).

Second, users of LFE seem to suspend expectations concerning norms of language usage (Canagarajah, 2007, p. 926). Described as a third space or *no-man's-land,* this suspension of preconstituted rules of communication helps to form a bridge between people of different cultural and language backgrounds. Canagarajah pointed to Planken's (2005) study of the professional uses of LFE, where it was noticed that in business communication, speakers signal for this state of getting along in spite of differences at the onset. Canagarajah commented that through "reflexive comments on their own communicative practices, self-deprecating humor, and the evocation of their shared nonnativeness, [users of LFE] distance themselves from their own norms and activate flexible practices that facilitate communication" (p. 926).

Third, users of LFE seem to adopt the *let-it-pass principle*, a term coined by Firth (1996) to describe when differences in form are overlooked for the sake of harmonious communication. This characteristic, closely related to the one above, calls attention to how LFE usage often seems to entail a cooperative orientation among its users. According to Seidlhofer (2004), the cooperative stance of LFE speakers leads to remarkably infrequent misunderstandings. The constant negotiation of meaning and reliance on pragmatic resources highlights the importance of communication strategies over forms of communication (Canagarajah, 2007, p. 936). LFE users evince an awareness of what to ignore and what to promote for smooth communication with speakers from different backgrounds. Canagarajah argued that the solicitous monitoring required in LFE shows that "acquisition and use go hand in hand" (p. 927). Skill in this domain must come from interaction.

Canagarajah emphasized the important role that shared interests play in LFE communication (2007, p. 935). It is through mutual interest in accomplishing some end that gives LFE its purposive power. When people are focused on accomplishing goals that require working together, they attend to what matters most, bypassing inconsequential surface details.

Features of English Learner Code-switching

I now turn to Fotos's research on code-switching (CS) as a learner strategy. After

discussing the research findings, I will explore the differences and similarities between LFE and CS. Fotos reviewed the literature on CS and found that learners used it to (a) promote solidarity and a positive learning atmosphere; (b) organize and manage L2 activities; (c) facilitate the expression of ideas and focus on the content (2001, p. 336). CS usage in the classroom can be categorized either as being a sociolinguistic strategy that functions to create a community or as a learning strategy to aid in dealing with the L2.

As a sociolinguistic strategy, Fotos wrote that CS "can enhance community membership, creating favourable affective conditions for learning" (2001, p. 330). The benefits of L1 use in the classroom connect with the view of the classroom as a 'community of practice,' a concept developed by Wenger (1998) to refer to the features of groups with shared interests. Learners make use of their L1 to promote collaborative interactions. Tapping into a shared language background helps build a positive atmosphere that fosters learning (p. 331).

As a learning strategy, Fotos found that Japanese university students used CS for (a) emphasis (of topic, etc.); (b) indication; (c) clarification; (d) framing discourse and attracting attention; (e) switching between personal feelings and factual material; (f) signaling repair; and (e) use as filler (2001, pp. 339-341). These particular uses of CS help students attend to both form and meaning. For instance, use of CS to signal repair attracts attention to an error of form. The student can potentially self-correct or receive feedback from teachers or peers. During meaning-focused speech, use of CS as filler and self-correction suggests that learners are managing their limitations in the L2 through the use of the L1 (p. 348).

Use of CS as a sociolinguistic strategy to promote community-building aligns with the cooperative orientation of LFE, but with some important differences. Use of CS builds a sense of community through a shared background (culture, L1). Users of LFE bridge differences by attending to the other speaker`s proficiency, suspending expectations of norms, and taking a solicitous approach. Both CS and LFE create a supportive atmosphere for communication. Canagarajah and Fotos both drew on the idea of a 'community of practice' in describing this function.

CS as a learning strategy is predominantly geared toward the individual learner managing the cognitive demands of the L2. In LFE, the focus is on the collaborative use of language to meet the needs of a particular social context. Fotos provided evidence that shows that CS is grammatical. Using *wa* and *ga* as topic markers, for instance, draws on the codes of Japanese grammar. Users of LFE cannot draw on such resources. It would be a detriment to the flexibility required in LFE usage to draw too heavily on the standards of one`s own particular speech community.

The way LFE and CS function to create a positive atmosphere for communication points to the importance of developing sociolinguistic competency. Their functioning as described by Canagarajah and Fotos suggests that an awareness of multilingualism can

be of great benefit. Strict adherence to a rigid conception of proper language use, which sometimes characterizes the attempt to set the goal of learning at the native-speaker level, ignores the many ways that the recognition of differences can be a valuable resource to draw on. I will now look at a possible way of having LFE and CS usage inform language teaching.

Lingua Franca English and Code-switching in the English Classroom

In pointing toward how LFE and CS can inform classroom procedures, I will draw on Willis`s (1996) elaboration of task-based language-teaching activities. I chose this framework for the flexibility it allows in designing activities that meet the needs of students. Willis (1996, pp. 10-16) wrote that the 3 essential conditions for learning a language are: (a) exposure to rich comprehensible input; (b) using the language for various purposes; and (c) motivation to engage with the language. Her task-based framework comprises three phases. In the pre-task phase, useful language to complete the task is activated through warm-up activities and relevant input. In the task phase, students complete a task, prepare the results, and make reports to the class. In the post-task phase, students are asked to analyze or become more attuned to certain aspects of the language.

The task-based framework can be adapted to fit the circumstances of a particular group of students. I will briefly describe how usage of LFE and CS can inform class procedures in each phase of the framework. In the pre-task phase, recordings of LFE speakers accomplishing a goal can provide the input. Students can be asked to attend to the strategies the speakers use to compensate for a lack of common background. As in the case of the LFE business communication discussed by Planken (2005), students might notice how certain opening remarks signal a willingness to make the conversation work in spite of differences in personal backgrounds. Students can gain insight into how meaning is negotiated without reference to native-speaker models. Playing recordings of speakers making prevalent use of CS can serve as a useful model for how to complete the task. Students might be asked to reflect on how the language would be affected when speaking with someone from a different language background as them.

In the task-phase students use whatever language resources they have to accomplish the task. The focus is largely on meaning, although students can shift between meaning and form as the need arises. A time limit and other parameters are set, which lets the students know what needs to be accomplished for a successful outcome of the task. The challenge of reaching the successful outcome provides motivation and interest in effective communication. Canagarajah's emphasis on how mutual interest functions to bring people together finds expression here. To use his language, students are "engaging actively in purposive activities" (2007, p. 935). Students are working collaboratively. They are finding out what works with a particular group to reach a

shared goal. Practice is linked with the development of strategic skills. During the task, CS can help students manage and organize the content of the activities. After the task is completed, students plan a report. The act of getting ready to report to the class puts pressure on the students to refine their language. While usage of CS might be appropriate in peer-to-peer interactions, it might be less so when speaking before an audience in a language classroom. The teacher might make this distinction explicit.

In the post-task phase, students have the chance to reflect on aspects of the language that promote intelligibility and successful communication. Canagarajah argued that "we have to focus more on communicative strategies, rather than on forms of communication . . . [to] develop language awareness . . . , rather than focusing only on mastering the grammar rules of a single variety" (2007, p. 936). Instead of relying on native-speaker communication as the sole model, practice of form can be put into the service of promoting communication in multilingual contexts. With LFE in mind, we need to think about what aspects of form need the most attention based on particular contexts.

To return to the idea of a 'community of practice,' when conducting task-based activities, teachers can promote a positive classroom atmosphere by allowing students to bring their interests to play in completing the task. By giving the students a variety of different activities and allowing them to negotiate how to accomplish them, we are giving them the chance to interact on their own terms. To this end, CS functions to promote active negotiation when accomplishing tasks.

Conclusion

I have looked at aspects of LFE and CS usage with a focus on how they might inform the practice of language teaching. The reflection on classroom practices was limited to a task-based approach. An awareness of how LFE and CS function can act as a catalyst for community building, positively influencing other approaches to language teaching.

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―Abstract―

The features of lingua franca English (LFE) and code-switching (CS) are examined for the potential role they can play in creating a positive and effective learning atmosphere in an English language classroom. LFE is characterized by its intersubjective construction, suspension of preconceived norms of language usage, and cooperative orientation among its users. CS among language learners is used to promote solidarity, manage learning tasks, and facilitate language expression. This paper describes how both LFE and CS can be incorporated into task-based language-teaching activities. An additional premise of the paper is that increased awareness of LFE and CS can lead to the inclusion of nonnative models of communication in classroom settings.