This paper explores the trajectory of Japanese business people’s use of English in global business contexts by listening to their narratives. It examines how their professional language repertoires have been shaped by their experiences over time and in various places, thorough the process of their development into mature business ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) users. The aim of this paper is to shed light on individual BELF (Business English as a Lingua Franca) (Louhiala-Salminen, Charles, & Kankaanranta 2005) users’ subjective views regarding their English use in comparison with current ELF and BELF research.

Drawing on their narratives, I analyse how such ELF users interpret and deal with their challenging experiences in their business communications. This analysis leads to a discussion on changes in their perceptions and communication skills of English. This study gives an insight into how BELF users who have been raised in highly ‘monolingual’ societies such as Japan change their perceptions of their own language based on their intercultural business experiences. In order to analyse such characteristics, participants have been chosen from Japanese business people who have been taught in the Japanese education system. Their perceptions of necessary BELF competence to perform their business tasks are explored. Additionally, hybridity, considered to be one of ELF users’ main characteristics (Jenkins, Cogo, & Dewey 2011; Kankaanranta & Planken 2010), is examined. According to their narratives, many of the participants frequently switch themselves between Japanese and non-Japanese business environments, and such contexts make them conduct multilingual practices with complexities and varieties. In particular, I focus on how Japanese business people perform their professional goals by utilising their multilingual resources of Japanese and English, at both an individual and community level.

Keywords: Trajectory, BELF, Narrative.