Evolving Identities and Co-constructing an ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) Community in an English-medium Academic Context

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This paper explores ELF communication among the students who are enrolled in an English-medium undergraduate program at a university in Tokyo. They are from various linguacultural backgrounds with different language learning and using experiences. The paper investigates the processes through which these students co-construct a new ELF community, accommodating to their linguaculturally diverse peers and faculty members in studying together and interacting with them during their four-year undergraduate program.

The students are categorized into four groups on the basis of their own emic category, i.e., jun-Japa (Japanese students raised and educated solely in Japanese), kikoku (returnees from overseas), ryugakusei (international students, in this case, mainly from Asian countries), and intaa (students graduated from international schools in Japan). The study illustrates in detail how these four types of students with disparate backgrounds gradually learn to accommodate to each other’s language learning and using experiences and to collaborate with them in constructing a convivial learning environment. This is achieved through their journey from ambivalent feelings at the outset, trying to insert and establish their old identities in this new community, to gradually noticing the nature of the unique ELF communicative environment they are placed in and learning to accommodate to different types of students. For example, NS or NS-like students become more accommodative to their ELF peers, and jun-Japa students become more effective ELF users, being freed from their old EFL identities and ‘correctness’ orientation constrained by NS norms.

This study describes how eventually all these students establish themselves as confident and considerate ELF users, strengthening solidarity in this newly co-constructed ELF community, collaborating with each other, constantly making adjustments where necessary. This will be discussed on the basis of data collected from participant observations, analyses of classroom discourse, focus group discussions and interviews.

Keywords: ELF, community, academic.