UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

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Negotiating the challenges of using English in business communication: Listening narratives of Japanese BELF users

by

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ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
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NEGOTIATING THE CHALLENGES OF USING ENGLISH IN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION: LISTENING NARRATIVES OF JAPANESE BELF USERS

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The unprecedented spread of the use of English in business worldwide has been accompanied by an increasing number of studies looking at the use of English as a Business Lingua Franca (BELF) (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011) among non-native English speakers, mostly in Europe but also in Asia. Research thus far has focused mainly on analysis of texts and discourses produced by BELF users, whereas in-depth research investigating users' sense making of their use of English has been limited. In order to fill this gap, this thesis places BELF users at the centre of the research by listening to their narratives, to explore their subjective views on their experiences of language use in global business contexts.

The focus of the study is on Japanese business people who had relatively low exposure to English before they started using English at work, with the aim of illustrating the ways in which they perceive and make sense of their experiences as BELF users. The participants are 34 business people who were born and educated exclusively in Japan, and have accumulated a range of experiences using English in a global business context.

Thematic analysis of their narratives reveals that participants share certain challenges such as attending and contributing in multinational meetings, dealing with lower productivity and avoiding mistakes in various communicative situations. Common approaches among the participants to negotiate such challenges include continuously developing the English skills needed to perform their business goals, as well as other means such as gaining power in communication through developing the quality of information and utilising stronger economic relations. Their stories also highlight that their use of English is characterised by the coexistence of English and Japanese, owing to the 'monolinguistic' nature of Japanese business communication. Finally, it is revealed that they change their perception towards using English as they progress through their career. Their perceptions are influenced by various factors such as their career paths, the organisations they belong to, and the interlocutors they have dealt with.

To conclude, this thesis provides insight into the emic view of non-native English users when they are trying to achieve their professional goals in business contexts. By offering an alternative angle to existing BELF studies, the thesis contributes towards a more holistic and multi-dimensional understanding of this increasingly complex phenomenon.

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Declaration of authorship

I, Miyuki Takino, declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

Title of thesis: Negotiating the challenges of using English in business communication: Listening narratives of Japanese BELF users

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;

2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;

3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;

4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;

5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;

6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;

7. Either none of this work has been published before submission, or parts of this work have been published as: [please list references below]:

Signed:

Date:

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Abbreviations

ELF	English as a lingua franca
BELF	English as a business lingua franca
EFL	English as a foreign language
MEXT	Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology
METI	Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry
TESOL	Teaching English to speakers of other languages
SLA	Second language acquisition
L1	First language
L2	Second language
MNC	Multinational Corporation
TOEIC	Test of English for international communications
TOEFL	Test of English as a foreign language
GMAT	Graduate Management Admission Test

Transcription conventions

.	clause final
…	short pause
@	laughter
[ ]	researcher commentary
Tojisya	non English word

Chapter 1: The background and aim

Introduction

This research started with questions I generated from my own experience as an English user in various contexts: as an English learner in classrooms in Japan, a user of English in business contexts in Japan, China, and the USA, as a student in higher education in the USA and the UK, and as a mother of children going through the British education system. English has always played an important role in my life having lived in Japan, China, the USA, and the UK. As a non-native English user, I gained opportunities to communicate in English in business and/or academic contexts where English was the only common language. While my use of English broadened my horizons beyond the border of Japan, such experiences came hand in hand with challenges, which have often made me feel frustrated and disappointed, but more importantly, left me with various questions both consciously and unconsciously. Having read a variety of research papers on the use of English in global contexts, I found that the challenges, frustrations and questions I faced as a non-native using English in global contexts had not been fully captured, or that the voice of users had not been reflected in these studies. Consequently, I decided to explore the use of English in global contexts strictly from the non-native speaker's point of view.

Soon after I started my research, I developed the belief that there was a need for a detailed investigation of Japanese business people's use of English for the sake of the Japan's English education planning. Both the government and academia (McKenzie, 2010; Kobayashi, 2013; Kubota & Mckay, 2009) stress that the series of English language education reform plans in Japan aim to prepare Japanese young people to become able to use English as a lingua franca in a globalised world. The Ministry of Education Culture Sports Science and Technology (MEXT) clearly positions English in the Japanese education context as playing 'a central role as the common international language in linking people who have different mother tongues'(MEXT, 2003b). Thus, the one of major objectives of English education in Japan can be defined as '[o]n graduat[ion] from university, graduates can use English in their work' (MEXT, 2003a). However, I realised that in the process of language planning, very few empirical investigation have been made into the 'real' needs of people who use English in the global contexts, including business people. A small number of macro-level investigations on the 'needs' of Japanese business have been taken into account (e.g. what percent of Japanese firms said that their employees lacked sufficient English competence: METI, 2009) but little micro-level analysis has been conducted and implemented (e.g. what challenges and needs the Japanese people have in their use of English). Without in-depth examination into the nature of the 'needs' of these Japanese ELF users, policy makers assume the traditional teaching models in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) developed in English speaking countries provide the best 'solutions' to achieve such an objective, and have developed the curriculum plans accordingly. Kobayashi criticises this decision process and she states her belief that Japanese government policies rely on English teaching professionals' 'unverified expectation[s]' (Kobayashi, 2013). I decided to attempt to fill this gap of knowledge throughout my research journey.

In the rest of the chapter, I outline the 'user centred research' I employ in this thesis and the reasons for doing so, and furthermore, why I focus on BELF (English as business lingua franca) users in particular. I then present my position as a researcher while discussing the background of the research. Because no research can escape from the subjectivisms and biases of the researcher and since the aim of this research has been strongly motivated by my own experiences as an English user, I discuss how I view the issues surrounding English in Japan and the global spread of English and how I position non-native English speakers in such contexts. Chapter 1 ends with a statement of my research aims and research questions. In Chapter 2, I review linguistic literature related to the global spread of English from two different angles; the English centred approach and the multilingual approach. The first part of the chapter is a literature review of how different linguistic frameworks investigate the global spread of English, and the second part reviews the multilingualism approach to the phenomenon known as globalisation. The literature review continues in Chapter 3, focusing on business contexts and linguistic studies on users of English for both business and professional purposes. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the methodological framework and analytical framework of the paper respectively. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 are a discussion of the research data from different perspectives. Chapter 6 focuses on the initial stage of use of English, with Chapter 7 focusing on the challenges and needs of BELF users. Chapter 8 looks at the trajectory and changes in participants' use of English. The thesis ends with Chapter 9, which answers the research questions, as well as discussing limitations, future research opportunities and contributions.

1-1 User centred research

Many researchers have studied challenges, perceptions and identities of non-native English users already, and 'user-centred' research may not sound like anything new. However, most linguistics research focuses on language first, and users tend to be positioned behind the language. As a result, users' internal meanings, emotions, contexts and historical backgrounds are often neglected. For instance, discourse analysis and corpus analysis have been effectively used to understand non-native users of English, but some aspects and elements are not visible to researchers with these approaches. Furthermore, many researches have some linguistic focuses, such as linguistic features or certain genres when analysing users, meaning that the data and discussion about users tend to be fragmented. In this research, the fundamental aim is to capture the view of non-native English users by putting ourselves into their shoes, and to understand their use of English through their eyes. In this research, I call people who use English as a non-native language, 'English users', rather than 'English learners'. Traditionally, the studies of English as a foreign language label those who are not native speakers as 'learners' with a hidden assumption that all non-native speakers are on the process of learning English towards the ultimate goal of attaining the 'standard English' (Firth & Wagner, 1997; Jenkins, 2006). More recently, researchers questioned this label and called for establishing their status as legitimate members of the English speaking community, but often on the peripherals of the English speaking community.

Kachru's three concentric circles of English users worldwide (Kachru, 1992a) is the most widely used conceptual map to overview the spread of English. The map positions native speakers in the centre and non-native speakers in the outermost circle, sending a clear message to non-native speakers that they are considered to be on the peripherals of the English speaking community from an English centred perspective. Yet, when I imagine a non-native user who stands on the outside circle of this conceptual map, the landscape he/she would see is different. The person is surrounded by users of his/her own mother tongue, and English 'comes' from outside the world he/she is familiar with. Capturing this landscape is central to this research. Needless to say, I do not claim user centred research in this way would take over other research with language as the main focus of exploration. I simply aim to offer a different angle on the issue, and therefore contribute towards a more holistic and multi-dimensional understanding of this increasingly complex phenomenon.

When I discuss 'use of English' in this research, I solely focus on the use of English for communication in the global context because I believe this is one of the most significant and dynamic linguistic changes that the modern world is experiencing. More specifically, in this research, I focus on Japanese people who use English for business purposes and I will discuss the implications of focusing solely on Japanese English users and business purposes later in Chapter 4 of the methodology.

In the following section, I discuss the background to this study to illustrate the context which my interest and theme of the research are situated in. Putting myself in the shoes of Japanese business people, I start my analysis of English in Japan, in which the Japanese people are deeply situated and strongly influenced. Then, I shift my discussion to the global perspective, or the phenomenon of the spread of English world-wide, in which issues of English in Japan are situated.

1-2 English in Japan

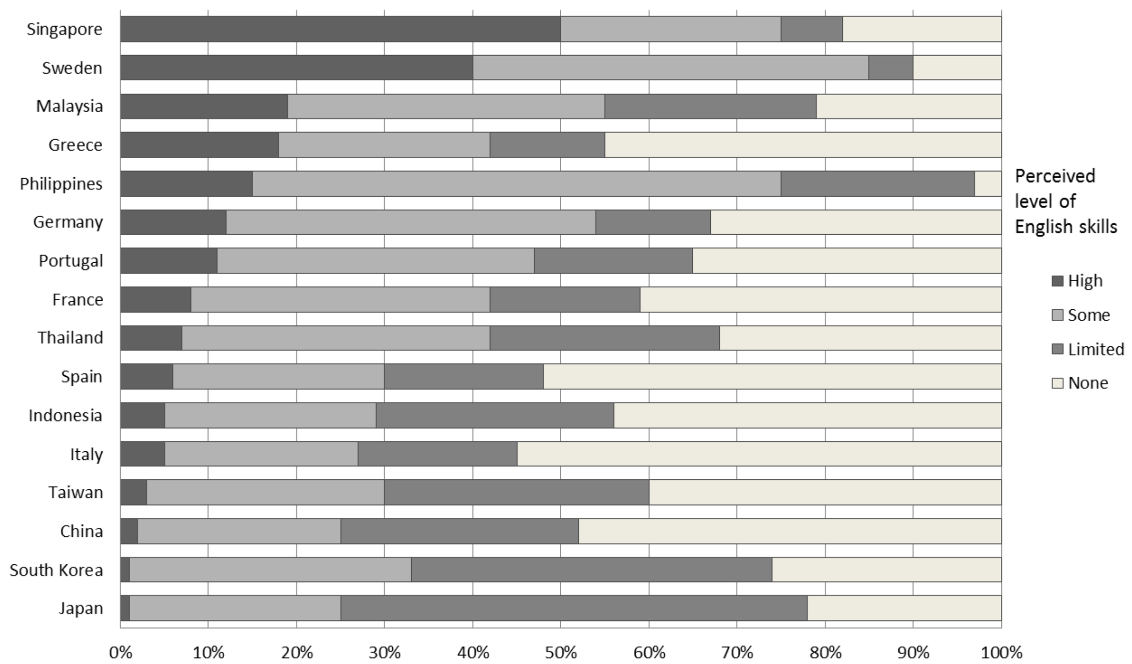
In this section, I explore how English has been discussed in Japan, not only as an academic literature review, but also as an illustration of the narrative environment (Chase, 2011; Sakurai, 2002) by covering governmental and non-governmental documents, discourses in journalism, and opinions and comments from a variety of people involved in the printed media and internet. As will be discussed in great detail in Chapter 4 and 5, the narrative will be used as a methodology in this research. People's narratives are shaped by and shape their narrative environment (Chase, 2011; Sakurai, 2002) which is 'narrative reality' in a local context (Chase, 2011). It is 'what does and doesn't get said about what, why, how and to whom' and is critical for in-depth analysis of participants' narratives about themselves, their motivation and how they make sense of their use of English.

Japan is often considered to be one of the countries with relatively strong monolingualism (Hashimoto, 2011; Hughes, 2008; Kobayashi, 2013; McKenzie, 2006; Ryan, 2011) where ethnicity, culture, language and identity are closely connected to 'Japaneseness'. The national education system and language policy have focused on Japanese identity and the Japanese language (Liddicoat, 2007; Hashimoto, 2011), although the notion of national monolingualism is an ideological construction (Park, 2011) and increasing diversity in ethnicity and language can be clearly seen in Japan (Kubota, 2002). The majority of Japanese people are rarely in regular contact with speakers of languages other than Japanese, and virtually all aspects of their lives are conducted in Japanese. Thus, while the presence of minor languages in Japan needs to be acknowledged, Japan should be considered a highly monolingual nation, at least in comparison to other nations. When English is discussed by academics, journalists and Japanese people, certain kinds of discourses are widely accepted, often as a matter of course of facts. These discourses are considered as 'model stories' of English in Japan. The most notable discourse, which often becomes a starting point of discussion of English, is the notion that Japanese people tend to be incompetent at English (Mizumura, 2008; Seargeant, 2009; Terasawa, 2012; Kobayashi, 2013) compared to counterparts of other countries. This 'incompetence in

English' in general is often criticised as a major cause of the 'unsatisfactory presence' of Japan in the international community, such as in business, politics and culture (Keidanren, 2000a; 2011; Keizai Doyukai, 2012; Funahasi, 2000). Furthermore, this 'incompetence' is often attributed to the failure of the English education in the Japanese education system (MEXT, 2003b). Although this study does not focus on discussing whether such 'model stories' reflect the reality, it is still necessary to explore further, why and how such discourses are shared amongst Japanese people in order to analyse participants' stories.

When 'the incompetence of Japanese people's English' is discussed, critics typically refer to their own and acquaintances' experiences as proof, or TOEFL scores and other results of internationally recognised proficiency tests (e.g.The Council on Promotion of Human Resource for Globalization Development, 2011), but such 'proof' has been criticised for relevance (Hasegawa, 2002; Terasawa, 2012). Terasawa aims to empirically cross-examine the proficiency distribution of Asian and European countries using social surveys conducted in 2000 (Terasawa, 2012), and his data (Figure 1) shows that the portion of people who consider themselves to have 'high' or 'some' English proficiency is lowest in Japan amongst the 16 participating countries of the survey: only 1% of the Japanese population considered their English proficiency to be at a 'high' level.

Figure 1 Percentage of respondents with self-evaluated English proficiency (by nationality)



(Asia Europe Survey 2000, data adapted from Terasawa 2010: 73 developed into a new figure)

When the number of people who consider themselves to have 'some' and 'high' level of proficiency is combined, Japan is still around the lowest, although several other countries also score lowly.

The statistics confirm that Japan is in a group of countries which have a small number of people who feel that they are able to use English. Such statistics are consistent with the claim that, in general, the proficiency of English amongst Japanese people is relatively low even among people from non-native English speaking countries. Since the 1990s, policy makers have become increasingly determined to implement a shift of language policy to respond to the criticisms that low proficiency of Japanese people is a result of 'failure of English education' and the requests to reform English education policy, (Hashimoto, 2011) mainly coming from business sectors (Keidanren, 2000a; 2011; Keizai Doyukai, 2012). The Japanese economy has been perceived in long periods of recession since the 1980s, and therefore, regaining Japanese companies' competitiveness in the global market has become an acute agenda for the government. The business sector has raised its voice for the needs of development and hunting of 'Global Human Resources' (Keidanren, 2011; The Council on Promotion of Human Resource for Globalization Development, 2012) which is commonly defined as 'people who can work effectively with foreigners using global languages'. In such an environment, several highly visible proposals to reform English education have been developed by both business communities and policy makers (MEXT, 2003a; 2011) and many have been implemented with controversy.

One of the major points of the controversy in the English education reform is the positioning of English as a lingua franca and implication of such status. The Japanese government's documents (The Prime Minister's Commission on Japan's Goals in the 21st Century, 1999) and reports from business communities (Keidanren, 2000b) repeatedly state that English is a lingua franca for global communication, but this lingua franca status is still controversial especially when it is discussed in the context of language education policy (Morizumi, 2012). Some people argue that Japan should pursue 'plurilingual' policy for various ideologies (Hasegawa, 2002). On the other hand, the government and educational community lack a systematic discussion and understanding on the implications of the positioning of 'English as a lingua franca' (ELF), changing from 'English as a foreign language' (EFL). Reform plans from the government have shown their strong belief that strengthening EFL oriented policies are the direction of reform of teaching English in Japan (e.g. MEXT, 2003a), departing from the traditional, grammar oriented, 'Japanese school English'. MEXT's reform plans emphasise hiring more 'native' speakers as English teachers, introducing methodologies popular among American and English TESOL, especially English only teaching. Emphasis is also placed on using scores of standardised tests, especially TOEIC and TOEFL to set tangible goals with 'global standard'.

In such environments, the ideology that success in a globalised world requires the mastery of English for both individuals and global organisations is widely circulated by journalists and public and private language debates. News that several highly visible Japanese firms such as Rakuten and Uniqlo have adopted English as a corporate language, are widely circulated by journalism, along with news that business sector uses competence in English as a precondition for hiring and promotions[1]. This further pressurises individual business people as well as students and future business people into investing time in learning and using English with an aim of mastering the language.

The above sketch of the debate surrounding English in Japan has shown that English has been problematic in many ways in Japan, and this issue has been the subject of a long and nationwide debate for decades. Participants of my study have grown up in the middle of this debate and have learnt and used English at a time when the language policy of the Japanese government has been criticised by the business sector, teachers, parents and most of all, students/learners themselves.

The above discussion focuses on the issues which have been widely debated in Japan, but most of those 'domestic issues' in Japan are caused and situated in the context of spread of English in the globalised world. Therefore, the following section review the spread of English from the global perspective.

1-3 Spread of English

The unprecedented speed and magnitude of spread of English in this increasingly globalised world has impacted a variety of aspects of people's social lives in diverse and multidimensional ways. Therefore, analyses and interpretations of globalisation differ widely, based on the observers' positions, activities, values and identities in society. I take a critical approach to globalisation with a view that it 'produces opportunities as well as constraints, new possibilities as well as new problems, progress as well as regression' (Blommaert, 2010: 4). As Crystal (2012) illustrates, the dominance of English being used worldwide is a result of historical chance that people who spoke English have been powerful militarily, politically, and economically (2012: 9). English was not chosen for its linguistic characteristics (2012: 7-8), but rather for the power held by people who speak it. Thanks to English speakers' economic and cultural wealth, the English

1 e.g. Business magazines' special issues such as President, issue 18 April, 2011 and Toyo Keizai issue 16 Nov, 2013. Both in Japanese.

language is rich with historical and cultural heritage and has been cherished by people who consider English as their mother tongue. However, this may cause conflicts when English becomes a global lingua franca, especially as the number of people who need to use it as an additional/second language is considerably greater than the population of native speakers[2].

Before exploring the role of English in the globalised era further, I would like to explore 'preferred futures' (Pennycook, 2001) for a language for global communication. 'Preferred futures' is 'some sort of vision of what is preferable'. It offers us 'a slightly more restrained and plural view of where we might want to head', and is needed as a ground in 'ethical arguments for why alternative possibilities may be better' (2001: 8-9). I bring up this discussion because in both government policies and academic research in Japan, global spread of English is often accepted uncritically, as a matter of fact. To understand how we can be critical to the spread of English, I would like to explore what could be an 'Ideal Lingua Franca' (lingua franca: contact languages used between people who do not share a first language, Jenkins, Cogo & Dewey, 2011). I use the phrase 'Ideal Lingua Franca' for the discussion to represent a concept of a language which is perfectly fitted to the needs of people who communicate across languages, ethnicities, nations, and cultures. According to Eco's book 'The Search for The Perfect Language' (Eco, 2010), the idea of the 'Ideal Lingua Franca', has been considered and challenged by a variety of intellectuals as far back as the 3rd-6th century, but such ideas have been abandoned due to the difficulties of developing an artificial language. Esperanto is the most successful artificial or designed language aimed as a vehicle to establish understanding between people who use different languages (Li, 2003). It was designed exactly for the purpose of pursuing the 'Ideal Lingua Franca', or in other words, a 'free and independent' language that is 'equal' and non-discriminatory to all ethnic groups and nations. Imagining a world where a language of 'equality' and 'freedom and independence' is used as a global lingua franca, the issues of making 'English as a native language' into a global lingua franca are clearly exposed. 'English as a native language' is not 'equal' or 'free and independent' at all. Needless to say, English has numerous advantages as a lingua franca. It is an obvious gift for non-native users that a significant volume of information already existed in English, well before the language became a dominant lingua franca, and this 'Library of Knowledge' (Mizumura, 2008) is now accessible to anybody who uses English.

[2] According to the detailed estimate of the number of English speakers worldwide by Crystal (2012), more than three quarters of the total English speakers in the world are non-native English speakers while less than a quarter of them use English as their native language,

1-4 Unequal access

From the 'economics of language' perspective (Gazzola & Grin, 2013; Van Parijs, 2002; 2008), use of English as a lingua franca for global communication imposes cost of global communication to those whose mother tongue is not English. These include both non-native speakers of English and non-speakers of English. On the other hand, native speakers of English are not only being freed from the cost of learning the language, but also gain from the use of English as the lingua franca in the global communication. Even among non-native English speakers, access to English differs significantly among non-native English speakers. For instance, while only 3% to 4% of Italian, French and Spanish considered themselves confident English speakers in 2012, over 30% of Swedes and Danes considered themselves to have 'very good' competence in English (Gazzola & Grin, 2013). Based on the statistical numbers, it would be reasonable to argue that one's access to linguistics resources of English could be influenced significantly depending on which country he/she is born in. Furthermore, the inequalities spread not only between countries, but also within countries (Blommaert, 2010). Terasawa provides statistical data in Japan that those who have wealthier backgrounds have better English skills (Terasawa, 2009). It would be also important to aware that there remain large portions of the global population who have very limited or no English competence, as clearly shown in the statistics in the EU and in Figure 1. Whilst often neglected in Japan, the issue of unequal access to English under its global spread has already been critically raised by many researchers in the field of sociolinguistics (e.g. Canagarajah, 2007; Pennycook, 2001; 2006). The widely circulated discourse in Japan that improving competence of English is urgently needed for Japan to compete in the global business should be evaluated in this context.

1-5 Aims and research questions

Given the standard viewpoint on the issue of global spread of English as previously discussed, the aim of my research is to investigate the realities of Japanese users of English as a lingua franca in a global context from users' own point of view. I focus my study on the business context, because, as will be discussed later, business is one of the domains where English is widely and actively used in a global context. Additionally, it is a vital aspect of one's life as it is closely related to their level of income, and thus quality of life. Geographically, I focus on Japan as it plays a significant role in the globalised world, and cross border businesses are an essential part of the Japanese economy. Furthermore, Japanese participants would be able to speak in their mother tongue to me without any potential English barrier. This is vital since this is a necessary condition for the research to be 'user-centred'. As I will further discuss in Chapter 2-1, I use the term 'BELF users' to refer to business people who use English for global business purposes.

Based on the discussion so far, I here present my research questions in this thesis. I investigate Japanese BELF users' perceptions about their use of English in the following three questions:

- What challenges related to their 'use of English' (e.g. those arising from their linguistic repertoire) have they encountered to achieve their business goals and what needs have they perceived?
- How do they deal with these challenges, what do they think of their achievements, and how do they make sense of their experiences?
- How have their challenges, needs, and dealings related to their 'use of English' changed over time?

As will be discussed in Chapter 3, one of the key distinguishing features of business discourses is 'goal orientation' (Bargiela-Chiappini, Nickerson & Planken, 2007; Koester, 2010), and accordingly, examination of their achievement of business goals needs to be considered an indispensable theme of studying business communication. Thus, the first research question focuses on users' challenges and needs on the process of pursuing communication goals.

In this research, 'needs' is defined as a perceived gap in capacity between what users themselves intend to achieve and what users believe they possess (Nakanishi & Ueno, 2003: 3; Ueno, 2011: 69). In business contexts, this gap could include a variety of aspects such as time and other resources, but in this study I focus on their BELF communications skills, or BELF competence. Thus, BELF users' needs are examined on what they perceive to be a 'gap' in their BELF communication skills (more detailed discussed in Chapter 3), in order to effectively achieve their goals. The question also aims to investigate their process of trying to fill the gap in their BELF competence. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, BELF competence is holistic, and the examination covers not only a narrowly focused English communication perspective, but also covers business communication and intercultural communication perspectives (Chapter 3-3).

The second question focuses on how BELF users deal with the challenges discussed in the first question. The focus of this question is not only what they do, but more importantly focuses on their interpretation of goals and needs, motivation for actions and their sense making or 'meanings' assigned (Bruner, 1991). Such subjective views of BELF users are not explicit, but

I consider them essential for user centred research as was discussed in Chapter 1-2. I also intend to investigate BELF users' personal values and emotions such as how they felt during the process of achieving goals, and how they evaluate their achievement of particular goals.

Moreover, by taking a multilingual approach as will be discussed in Chapter 2-3, the investigation covers not only the English language repertoire, but also Japanese repertoires when they are used in conjunction with English. Thus, the above questions also investigate how BELF users use their multilingual resources to fulfil their needs and what motivates their use of Japanese language repertoires in BELF communications.

The third question focuses on changes in the challenges and needs of users, reflecting changes of a wide variety of factors in their professional trajectory, including time, space, one's career and business environment. This examination leads to discussion on how they have changed their perception of English, how they have learnt and developed their BELF competence, and how they develop and grow as professional BELF users. Furthermore, the process of their developments such as how they negotiate, accommodate and resist through using English during their career will be studied.

Chapter 2: English and globalisation

Introduction

This chapter considers the spread of English from a linguistic perspective. Firstly, I review the literature of linguistic study to investigate the spread of English placing the English language at the centre of research. Then I will review the linguistic literature to look at changes in language use in the globalised era from a multilingual perspective. By reviewing the literature in this way, I present my choice of theoretical framework for this research, ELF. The discussion will then continue in the following chapter of the literature review which is concerned with BELF.

2-1 The global spread of English and ELF

This section aims to see the worldwide spread of English as discussed in Chapter 1-3, based on linguistic research. My discussion in this part has two aims. Initially, I present the definition of English as a lingua franca (ELF) as a framework, and then I review the ELF research on the topic. This is because BELF, the primary theoretical framework of this study, is defined as the adoption of the ELF framework into business contexts. Secondly, I present my view on alternative approaches to the global spread of English, so that I can discuss the strengths and limitations of these approaches, and present why I view ELF as the most suitable linguistic framework for this study.

2-1-1 ELF approach

The term ELF, or English as a lingua franca, has been used increasingly among researchers, and their reasons for using the term differ widely. In this section, I consider the following three dimensions of ELF.

1. ELF as a phenomenon situated in the context of the spread of English
2. ELF as 'language(s)' used in the interaction
3. ELF as a research paradigm and as a positon of ELF researchers

The consideration of ELF as a phenomenon which is ongoing as part of globalisation and the spread of English is used by researchers as well as by journalists to illustrate a significant change of language use worldwide. The phenomenon can be summarised descriptively and neutrally: as the world globalised, the need for communication across borders increased. As such, English has been increasingly used as a lingua franca regardless of the mother tongue of interlocutors. As a result, exchanges in English between non-native English speakers have become common, and the number of non-native English users exceeds that of native speakers (Crystal, 2012). Today, English is often used without the presence of native speakers. ELF is often used interchangeably with English as a global language and English as an international language. How individuals make sense of the ELF phenomenon, and how they analyse implications of the phenomenon depend upon how they view the phenomenon.

Secondly, ELF is also often defined as 'a contact language used by people with different mother tongues' (Jenkins, Cogo & Dewey, 2011; Jenkins, 2006). According to this definition, the English in ELF includes a variety of Englishes. The researcher's main interest in ELF interaction is predominantly the nature of interaction between non-native users of English, though ELF interactions do not exclude those whose first language is English, or those who would be categorised as native speakers of English. The following are characteristics of ELF interactions that are generally agreed on by researchers, though detailed interpretations vary depending on the study.

Firstly, ELF is considered to be fluid, flexible, contingent, hybrid and deeply intercultural (Jenkins et al., 2011; Seidlhofer, 2011), rather than being regulated by the framework of standard English. This is reflective of the wide variety of ELF users, who have different mother tongues and cultural backgrounds, as well level of competency of English. Another widely observed characteristic is the influence of users' first language and other languages in their ELF communication. Consequently, hybridity is considered as one of the salient characteristics of ELF. Because ELF users are less constrained by the norms of standard English, ELF users often negotiate and construct meanings to establish understanding. To do so, ELF users are often observed being collaborative and accommodative in their ELF communication (Jenkins et al., 2011; Seidlhofer, 2011).

The use of ELF as a research paradigm is characterised by the following concepts shared by ELF researchers (Jenkins et al., 2011; Jenkins, 2007; 2009; Seidlhofer, 2011). Firstly, ELF users are considered legitimate users of English, regardless of their competence, mother tongue and any other characteristics. ELF users should therefore not be viewed as deficient users or learners who are on the process of becoming able to use English as native speakers. Secondly, ELF conversations are to be analysed in their own right, and its differences from standard English are to be considered creative uses of linguistic resources including both English and other languages, rather than 'mistakes' or 'incompetence' in English. Thirdly, ELF users should not be evaluated based on the native norms, or how closely one can use English as a native speaker use English. Instead, non-native English speakers should be considered as being 'highly skilled communicators who make use of their multilingual resources' (Jenkins et al., 2011). The above concepts are developed based on ELF researchers' analysis of ELF discourse, ELF corpus, ethnological field work and other methods of studying ELF conversations, as well as through conceptual research (e.g. Seidlhofer, 2000; 2011). However, it is not very clear from the research papers, whether these concepts are the orientation of ELF researchers, assumption made by ELF researchers, or a result of the observation of ELF users' own perceptions and attitudes. Since I will present more in-depth discussion on BELF later in Chapter 4, the review of ELF in this chapter limits itself to a rather general discussion on ELF, without referring to complex disagreements among researchers.

As presented in Chapter 1, I use BELF as the primary linguistic framework for the present research, and therefore, ELF as a research paradigm. Consequently, findings from ELF research have contributed in the development of the concept of this research. I therefore present two main insights from the ELF paradigm as the theoretical framework to contribute in the development of the study. Firstly, and most importantly, ELF is the theoretical framework which mainly focuses on non-native English speakers. ELF researchers do not consider ELF users as learners that are striving to reach the native model of English (Jenkins et al., 2011), and accept ELF users' characteristics which are often different from native speakers in phonology, syntax, vocabulary, and pragmatics. In this regard, ELF researchers positively study hybridity of ELF communication as a consequence of ELF users making use of their rich multilingual resources (Jenkins et al., 2011; Seidlhofer, 2011).

Secondly, ELF researchers pay specific attention to the characters and requirements of different domains, especially in business and academia, and their studies have revealed characteristics of ELF usages in these domains on a global scale. In particular, in the business domain, BELF has been explored substantially, and findings of researchers on the topic provide resourceful background knowledge for investigating business English users in Japan. Therefore, the domain oriented approach of ELF, rather than the history or nation oriented approaches, is more suitable for the analysis of English users in business contexts in the globalising era.

2-1-2 Other approaches

It is, of course, not only the ELF paradigm that has been developed to investigate the current spread of English, and the orientations of researchers differ and interpretations of the phenomenon itself vary. I briefly review a number of alternative paradigms by looking at the strengths and limitations of each paradigm. By doing so, I believe that I can clarify how the ELF paradigm is different from other paradigms and present rationally why I use the ELF paradigm. I also identify some of the implications which may be meaningfully integrated into this study.

2-1-2-1 Linguistic imperialism

I first discuss an interpretation of the global spread of English as 'linguistic imperialism' (Phillipson, 1992) along with an approach of 'linguistic human rights' (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1997). Both paradigms look upon the spread of English as a new form of colonialism, which poses a threat to language diversity and language rights. This position has played a leading role in raising an alarm for the fundamental inequality and conflicts intrinsic in the spread of English, and provides an 'easy-to-understand' analytical framework when one intends to criticise the issue. However, connecting the spread of English directly with the political intentions of the American or British and with the promotion of Western imperialism is overly simplistic. It also focuses too narrowly on criticising the phenomenon and fails to respond to the reality of needs for efficient global communication in today's interconnected world, especially in the business context.

2-1-2-2 Non-critical approaches

The most contrasting position to the above is to accept the spread of English as an efficient move in the global era, without paying critical questions to how the spread of English impacts society and without questioning how the use of English has changed globally. Pennycook explains this position as a discourse which tends to 'look at the spread of English as [a] natural, neutral and beneficial' phenomenon (Pennycook, 1994; 6). In other words, this position accepts English as a global language uncritically and assumes that this 'English as a global language' has to be taught, learnt and evaluated based on how native speakers of English use English. Interestingly, as Seidlhofer argues, such a perception is often uncritically shared by 'mainstream SLA teachers and researchers', although sociolinguists have continuously rejected this approach (Seidlhofer, 2011: 10-11). There appears to be no explicit paradigm being formed to support this view in linguistic academia. As I discussed in the chapter of English in Japan (2-1), this position is unconsciously shared by a large part of English educators and English learners in Japan.

2-1-2-3 World Englishes

The approach of World Englishes has been pioneered to acknowledge a variety of Englishes developed in various countries, to analyse the historical background of these varieties, and to study characteristics of them. Since the 1980s, different varieties of Englishes have been studied and in particular, Kachru's three concentric circle analysis of World Englishes (Kachru, 1992; 2005) has proven influential. This map was significant in legitimising 'outer circles' of the Englishes, mainly used in former British colonies such as India, Singapore, Nigeria and Kenya. However, this approach heavily relies upon the distinction of nations and focuses on the description of different types of English taking into account historical backgrounds and the effects of colonialism. Relatively little attention has been given to the 'expanding circle', in which Japan is included. With such focuses, its framework does not respond effectively to the mobilisation of the globalised world and interaction of different 'circles' even though such issues are a major area of focus of this study.

2-1-3-4 English as an international language (EIL)

The term, English as an international language, or English as a global language, have been used on a general level from the beginning of the spread of English, and many ELF researchers consider the term equivalent to ELF. However, EIL has been used by some researchers (e.g. Matsuda, 2012; Matsuda & Friedrich, 2011) to manifest that they have different approaches to ELF. For instance, their interpretation of the ELF paradigm is trying to capture the characteristics of 'elusive varieties' of 'English as a Lingua Franca' (Matsuda & Friedrich, 2011), but this does not accurately reflect the development of ELF research. The term English as an international language or as a global language are used in this study to generally refer to a spread of Englishes worldwide, because these words are often used in Japan instead of ELF. It may be because EIL is equivalent of direct interpretation of the widely used Japanese terms such as '国際語としての英語' (English as an international language) or '国際英語' (International English) while the Latin origin of the European historical word 'lingua franca' is not familiar to the majority of the Japanese people.

2-1-3-5 Critical Approaches

In this group, I discuss various researchers who share a critical approach to the current spread of English. These researchers try to correct 'false understandings' in the discussion of the global spread of English 'in order to open up the possibility of change' (Richards, 2003: 40). One notable researcher is Pennycook (1994; 2001; 2006) who has critically scrutinised many of the unquestioned assumptions linguists have unconsciously taken for granted (Pennycook, 2001), stressing the need to pay attention to the politics of language teaching. He underscores how language is always taught in a political context, and is a locus of political struggles (2001). His critical analysis of various approaches taken by academia, and of the political side of spread of English is insightful (Pennycook, 1994) for me in this study to frame questions to many of 'the unquestioned assumptions'. He more recently shifts to the idea of 'metrolingual practice' (Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010; 2011) which conceptualises the global use of English from a multilingual perspective. I will discuss this in more depth in Chapter 2-2. The critical approach to 'English as a global language' is also presented by some Japanese researchers (Kobayashi, 2013; Kubota,

2011) who criticise the current educational policy in Japan as being excessively economically-driven. They suggest that the current system will inevitably result in the reproduction of social and economic inequality. However, this position seems not to respond to the centre of the debate in the Japanese language policy, which is how individual people and company could 'survive' the reality of the globalised world.

2-2 Multilingualism and hybridity in ELF

In this part, I discuss the relatively new way of looking at a person's language repertoire as 'multilingual resources'. This is an emerging new way of looking at an individual's language holistically, rather than by 'each language'. Although no single term represents the idea, multilingualism would be the widely used umbrella term which represents the group of researchers, who use different terms to discuss their concept. Translanguaging (García, 2008), plurilingualism (Beacco, 2005), third spaces (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López & Tejeda, 1999), metrolinguistics (Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010; 2011), translingualism (Canagarajah, 2013a; 2013b) and fragmented multilingualism (Blommaert, 2010) are all emerging terms which aim to capture multilingual practice today.

As mentioned above, hybridity is considered to be one of the distinctive characteristics of ELF communication, because ELF users exploit their multilingual resources to communicate in English (Seidlhofer, 2011). The implication is that multilingual researchers essentially study the same ELF users from a different perspective and analyse communication of the person, not by positioning English communication as the centre of their investigation, but by looking at their communication as a whole by any language they have access to. Based on this point of view, the ELF paradigm does not conflict with the multilingual paradigm, but it sees the same multilingual users only from a different perspective. In some research, both ELF and multilingualism are meaningfully combined (e.g. Cogo, 2012).

The basic assumptions of multilingual researchers are that languages are always in contact and mutually influence one another, and that multilingual uses treat all of the codes in their repertoire as a continuum, and not separated from each other (Canagarajah, 2011; 2013b). Historically, however, the concept of communicative competence had been based on a model of monolinguals (Chomsky, 1965; Hymes, 1967), and it was Cook's' 'multi-competence'[3] (Cook, 1992) which called on researchers to pay attention to the multilingual perspective of the

[3] Cook uses both 'multicompetence' and 'multi-competence' in his papers, and 'multi-competence' is used in this research because he uses this expression more recently. His homepage (http://homepage.ntlworld.com/vivian.c/SLA/Multicompetence/index.htm) where he explains the concept in details uniformly uses 'multi-competence'.

competence of L2 speakers. Cook emphasises the multilingual aspect of L2 users as they have 'the knowledge of more than one language in the same mind' (Cook, 1994), and their competence should 'involve(s) the whole mind of the speaker'. He called researchers to change a way of looking at multilingual uses from 'fractional', to a 'wholistic' interpretation of bilingualism (Cook, n.d.). During the past decade, a variety of researchers joined the discussions on multilingualism from a different perspective (Auer & Wei, 2007; Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Dyers, 2008; Hall, Cheng & Carlson., 2006; Weber & Horner, 2012). They differ from Cook's outlook in that they see languages not as distinctively different systems but as a continuum. More recently, 'the mixed use of languages' and fluid and dynamic characters of such use in the mobilised society have been actively studied by researchers (e.g. Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010; 2011; Pennycook, 2006; Canagarajah, 2011).

Meanwhile, Blommaert's book on the sociolinguistics of globalization (2010) convincingly presents a comprehensive discussion of how the concept of 'language' needs to be redefined, based on his analysis that people in the globalised era are increasingly 'multilingual'. He argues that the mobility of globalisation is the central theoretical concern, and mobility is a trajectory through different and 'stratified spaces' (2010: 5) and times in which people use languages. No person's language repertoire is 'fixed' in space and time, because over the course of the trajectory, people need to stretch their repertories by synthesising them and by adding new 'languages'. According to Blommaert, each person has developed their own individual and unique repertoire through different historical trajectories. He focuses on 'language repertories' as the real 'language resource' that people possess in the mobilised society. Thus, people's 'language resources' are fragmented and incomplete and contain only specific 'bits' of languages the person has used. He positions English for global communication as a part of this patchwork of individual's 'multilingual resources'. Having reflected upon my understanding and observation of individuals' language use, I find Blommaert's discussion and his concept of fragmented multilingualism convincing. It is for this reason that I will apply his concept in my research in discussion of multilingual aspect of participants.

Blommaert and most other multilingual researchers have developed theoretical frameworks based on analysis of linguistically diverse societies where several languages coexist. I find how these theoretical frameworks with multilingual perspective could be applied to people who have grown up in a largely monolinguistic society such as Japan, is particularly intriguing. Applying Blommaert's fragmented multilingualism, a typical Japanese person's multilingual language repertoire can be considered to consist of a highly dominant presence of strong and well-rounded Japanese and a minor presence of a patchy and very limited repertoire of English, reflecting the reality of the Japanese education system. By the end of their education, Japanese university students spend less than 1500 hours[4] studying English in lessons, while they spend nearly their entire life using Japanese.

As far as my knowledge extends, there is no multilingual research which specifically focuses on investigating how such Japanese people use their 'linguistic resources' to communicate in English, from the multilingual perspective. The only related study, I found, is a conceptual discussion by Yanase (2010), who has been exploring a similar theme, by positioning the Japanese language as a 'meta-language' for Japanese. Referring to Ortega's 'Bilingual Turn' (Ortega, 2010), Yanase says that somebody who has been educated in the Japanese education system using Japanese as their first language cannot be freed from the influences of the native language when using a second language and hence, aiming at 'pure English' is an artificial illusion. He argues that when intellectual and complex tasks are done, it is simply not enough for most Japanese learners of English to think only in English. Instead he finds that there is a need to utilise Japanese for deep thinking and intellectual discussions. This is the strategy that he learnt both theoretically and in practice in his own academic work. While he uses the term 'meta-language' to conceptualise this function Japanese language plays, his idea seems to be highly analogous to the approach of multilingual researchers' framework I have discussed. In other words, applying Petrovic's expression (2009), English resources of Japanese people are often 'built on' their overwhelmingly well-established Japanese linguistic resources.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the approaches which study the global spread of English from a linguistic perspective. Initially, I discussed ELF as the primary linguistic theoretical framework in comparison with other paradigms. I followed by presenting multilingualism as a different approach to studying ELF users, focusing on Blommaert's fragmented multilingualism and on Yanase's conceptual argument to look at Japanese language as a 'meta-language' for Japanese. Based on those frameworks I have chosen, I will continue my discussion by focusing on the business domain and spread of English.

[4] Hours of English lessons determined by MEXT is less than 1000 hours for 6 years in Junior highs school and high school and most likely less than 300 hours for university, depending on the curriculum (Nishie, 2009). Therefore, by the end of their education, Japanese university students typically spend less than 1500 hours studying English in lessons, while they spend nearly their entire life using Japanese.

Chapter 3: Englishes in business contexts and BELF

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the literature to review findings of previously presented BELF research, and to illustrate the BELF environment where people who use English as a business lingua franca are surrounded. Because the perception and needs of users of English are influenced by various aspects of the context, I aim to cover a wide range of findings in related literature from different disciplines. Firstly, I review the definition of BELF and provide a brief background to the research on BELF. This will be followed by major findings of research mainly from Northern and Central Europe, which are the leading centres of BELF research. Then, I will briefly discuss research from Asian countries, to display some regional differences as well as the variety of BELF users worldwide. This is critical since these people are often working in tandem with Japanese BELF users. Lastly, I discuss in detail the use of English as a lingua franca in a business context in Japan.

3-1 BELF

3-1-1 BELF approach

In this thesis, I analyse the needs and challenges of Japanese business people who use English in order to conduct their business tasks in the global business context where people from different linguistic backgrounds interact with one another. I use the term BELF to represent communication they participate in. The term BELF was first used by Louhiala-Salminen et al. (2005) to apply the concept of ELF into a business context. It was defined as 'a language that is nobody's own, but can be shared' and 'is used in the business discourse community' (Louhiala-Salminen & Charles, 2006: 31-34). Since then, a group of researchers have used the term BELF to discuss English as a contact language in business worldwide, and as an approach which specifically pays attention to the spread of English in global business. I use the term 'BELF users' (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005) to represent the business people who use ELF in the business context. I avoid using the word 'BELF speakers' (Nickerson, 2009) because this term neglects the unquestionable importance of reading and writing in communication.

Although the term BELF has been increasingly used among researchers (e.g. Gerritsen & Nickerson, 2009; Pullin, 2010; Wolfartsberger, 2009), some researchers use the terms 'International Business English (IBE)' (Gerritsen & Nickerson, 2009) or 'English for International Business' (EIB) (Rogerson-Revell, 2007; 2008) instead of BELF, because they interpret BELF to represent communication exclusively among non-native speakers of English. This interpretation is based on the 'traditional definition of ELF' (Jenkins, 2007: 1), however, ELF researchers have come to agree that ELF may include native speakers (for more detailed discussion, see Jenkins, 2007, pp. 1-3). As will be illustrated in the later part of this chapter, globalisation makes people more mobile (Blommaert, 2010), and consequently, English could be the mother tongue, L1 or L2 for these people regardless of their nationalities depending on their life histories (Blommaert, 2010). It is also increasingly normal for people from different countries to work together in one organisation (Shiraki, 2009), such as in American companies that hire many non-native English speakers and Japanese companies that hire native speakers of English. In such a business environment, it is unpractical to change the conceptual framework of communication, between BELF and IBE or EIB, when only one native speaker of English joins or leaves a meeting among non-native speakers; this situation is by no means unusual in business today. Therefore, in this study, a BELF user is defined as a business person who uses English for global business purposes, with people who do not share his/her own language, including both non-native and native speakers of English.

3-1-2 Background of BELF research

English had been used as a lingua franca among non-native speakers in business contexts well before the introduction of the term BELF in 2005. Much of the research on English communication 'among non-native speakers of English' in the business context (e.g. Marschan-Piekkari, Welch & Welch, 1999; Rogerson-Revell, 2007; 2008) in different disciplines such as 'English for specific purposes', 'business or management communications' and 'intercultural communications' have been, and continue to be conducted without using the term BELF.

When it comes to studying BELF from a 'non-native speaker's perspective', a key role has been played by the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), where researchers focus on how English as a foreign language is used in a particular context. The ESP journal has accumulated 'research-based teaching projects' relevant for BELF, including in a special issue of 'English as a lingua franca in international business contexts' (Volume 24, Number 4, 2005) and others (Planken, 2005; Chew, 2005). The field of business and management communication explores the quality, mechanisms and consequences of communication in business contexts, led by scholars at business schools in North America. More broadly, the field of international management also explores communication as an important element of cross-border management (for more detailed discussion, look at Piekkari, 2009; Reinsch, 2009; Louhiala-Salminen, 2009), but much of the research has been traditionally carried out from a native English speaker's perspective. Many of their pedagogical implications in communication strategies and teaching methodologies are also translated into other languages often in the form of textbooks for business education (e.g. Fisher & Ury, 2003, books from Harvard Business Review and Harvard Business Press; Montolio & Ramallo, 2009). In European countries, the field focuses more on 'close text analysis' (Bargiela-Chiappini, Nickerson & Planken, 2007) from multilingual viewpoints, covering not only English but also French, German, Dutch and other European languages (for more detailed discussion, see Bargiela-Chiappini et al., 2007: 31).

Intercultural communication explores interactions beyond boundaries of culture, and at the early stage, the focus was on differences in national culture. In business contexts, cultural aspects of business behaviour have been studied by comparing two or more cultures (e.g. Yamada, 1997; Hofstede, 1994), where the culture tends to be equivalent to national culture (Piller, 2009). However, as the relationships between business people has become more fluid and flexible, and globalisation in business has progressed to internalisation of corporations and individuals (Friedman, 2005), researchers have begun to see 'move[ment] beyond using limiting national stereotypes as interpretative categories'. Instead, they explore 'multiple identities' of business people (Bargiela-Chiappini et al. 2007: 26).

In summary, the emerging BELF research is not a newly-born isolated approach, nor is the BELF interaction a new phenomenon, but it is a re-conceptualisation of English as a lingua franca in business contexts that looks to respond to the growing spread of BELF communication in world-wide business, inheriting the disciplines discussed above. In this study I aim to combine perspectives of 'ESP', 'business communication' and 'intercultural communication' under the theoretical framework of BELF. As Kankaanranta and her colleagues present, discussion of competence in BELF has included aspects of these three disciplines (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010; Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011).

3-1-3 Applying BELF framework

In this study, by applying the BELF framework, I reinforce my 'non-native centric' analytical framework, rather than the 'native centric' framework. A clear benefit of using a BELF framework is that it analyses communication from the perspectives of Japanese business people themselves. Moreover, a BELF framework enables the research to be conducted in a highly inclusive and holistic manner by inheriting three more traditional discipline as discussed in the previous section. From BELF users' point of view, the divisions among disciplines do not exist, and they have 'multiple identities' (Bargiela-Chiappini et al., 2007: 26).

Some researchers (Koester, 2010; Poncini, 2002) argue that 'the heart of recent studies of BELF' has been focused on 'what seems to work' (Koester, 2010: 126) rather than 'miscommunication' based on criticisms to 'intercultural communication' which tends to incorrectly assume that intercultural interactions are problematic. However, on this matter, I take a neutral position by paying attention to both successes and failures of BELF communications since I believe that both looking at 'what seems to work' and 'problematic' interactions provide valuable insight into the attitudes of BELF users.

Distinguishing business communication from other types of communication is not straightforward, but the key distinguishing features of business discourse is 'goal orientation' (Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson, 2002; Koester, 2010; Bargiela-Chiappini et al., 2007). Business people usually have some core goals to achieve through communication, and this goal is fundamentally somehow associated with the goals of the institutions they belong to. As a result, the communication of business people is influenced by the values and norms of institutions and they are usually situated within organisational structures that typically lead to unequal power relationships (Charles, 2007; Koester, 2010; Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999).

3-2 BELF Research in Northern and Central Europe

3-2-1 Influential studies in Europe

BELF research has been pioneered and so far largely led by researchers in European countries, specifically in Scandinavia and Germany. Firstly, I will briefly discuss three series of BELF studies, as they provide abundant data and in-depth analyses which I believe effectively illustrate the environment in which European BELF users are situated. Afterwards, I will discuss major findings which have emerged from BELF and BELF related research in these European countries, followed by a discussion on the issues from findings of the research.

Charles and her colleagues' series of studies on the Finn-Swedish cross-border merged companies (Charles, 2007; Kankaanranta, 2006; Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005) was the first study which introduced the new term BELF, intending to combine linguistic frameworks of ELF and the domain-specific operational rules in international business. The study examines communication and language use in newly merged Finnish-Swedish companies, which is characterised by 'the highly interesting situation'. Cross-border mergers and choice of English as a corporate language by MNCs are increasingly common practices in global business and this study sheds light on the consequence of such business decisions from a linguistic perspective. The study is influential and symbolic; not only has it pioneered BELF study, but it has also brought some fundamental characteristics of BELF. Their discussion covers pragmatic use of English, use of contextual cues, and flexibility to BELF users' own and others' English. The project was followed by a series of studies with different analytical focuses such as e-mail communication (Kankaanranta, 2006), language choice (Charles, 2007), perception (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010), global communicative competence (GCC) (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011) and BELF competence (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010).

Another influential piece of research from the field of International Business is a series of extensive studies on the Finnish MNC, Kone Elevators, which adopted English as a corporate lingua franca in the 1970s (Charles & Marschan-Piekkari, 2002; Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999). Based on an in-depth analysis of over 100 people's interviews, researchers illustrate that Kone Elevators' language strategy and its choice of English as a corporate language has had a huge impact on power structure of the MNC organisation. Researchers continued their research of English as a corporate language on other Finn and German MNCs (Charles & Marschan-Piekkari, 2002; Fredriksson, Barner-Rasmussen & Piekkari, 2006).

Ehrenreich's ethnological study of BELF in a German MNC and its German managers is one of the rare studies which focus on 'perception of BELF users' and provides detailed analysis on the perception and attitude of German managers and thus provides interesting points of reference to this study. According to Ehrenreich, German managers consider English to be 'indispensable and something so natural that one do[es] not pay any special attention [to it] during day to day business exercise' (Ehrenreich, 2009; 2010; 2011). She vividly depicts how they perceive English from the practicality and efficiency points of view and how they determine appropriateness of BELF communication through the practice in the company.

3-2-2 Major discussions/findings of BELF in Europe

Based on the outcome of the research mentioned above and other BELF related research in Europe, I now discuss major findings on the linguistic environment and BELF users in Europe.

Firstly, English has been widely confirmed as a 'must' in companies where cross-border interactions are an integral part to their business, and hence most of the participants in the research acknowledge English as a necessary skill for their business (Bargiela-Chiappini et al., 2007; Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005). Although language matters in international business (Charles, 2007), in daily work, English is regarded as a natural part of their daily business (Ehrenreich, 2012).

3-2-2-1 Pragmatic Use

The most distinguishable characteristic of BELF users which emerged from the research is their pragmatic attitude towards the use of English and flexibility in language variation of both themselves and their counterparts (Louhiala-salminen, 2002; Poncini, 2002; 2007). A pragmatic attitude means solving problems in a practical and sensible way rather than fixing ideas or theories, and languages are used under such attitudes. Ehrenreich's research provide detailed perception of German managers. They find native speaker proficiency in English is 'unrealistic' and also 'unnecessary' from a cost-benefit point of view (Ehrenreich, 2010). They also say if 'not to make mistakes' becomes the priority, their only option is to remain silent, but such behaviour is not appropriate (Ehrenreich, 2010). German managers are very much aware that their linguistic practices 'may be contentious and externally problematized', especially by language professionals, as they asked why the researcher was interested in their 'bad English' (Ehrenreich, 2009). Ehrenreich further argues that BELF users in general, as content-focused speakers, may be more positive to non-native standards and concept of ELF (Ehrenreich, 2009).

Flexibility of language use is confirmed widely by BELF research (Ehrenreich, 2009; Koester, 2010; Pitzl, 2005; Rogerson-Revell, 2008). 'Coining and establishing new words and phrases, ad hoc meaning-making as well as culturally enriching the language by spontaneous translations of mother-tongue metaphors and idiomatic expression(s)' are all discussed in detail as examples of 'pragmatic resourcefulness' (Wenger, 1998: 80) in Ehrenreich's study (2009; 2010). These flexible uses of language are learnt from practice; being tried and re-examined in day-to-day business. Such resources are developed and shared efficiently and in a manner which is 'appropriate-to-their-enterprise' among members of the company (Ehrenreich, 2010).

Collaboration and accommodation are also widely observed among BELF users as an effort to co-construct intelligibility (Pitzl, 2005; Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010; Koester, 2010). Pitzl (2005) shows how ELF users collaborate together using coping strategies to repair potential communication breakdowns during business meetings and argues that proficient ELF speakers negotiate meanings actively and efficiently. Ehrenreich (2010) reports that these coping strategies include comprehension checks, asking for clarification and repetition, and attention to facial expressions. Kankaanranta et al. point out that as BELF users usually share some clear business goals as objectives, the shared goals motivate them to be cooperative to negotiate meaning and accommodate one another's language (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010).

How BELF users accommodate their English depends largely on the other party's competence and knowhow. If the other party's language proficiency is weaker, 'BELF users simplify their English, with simpler structures and words, and make a special effort to guarantee understanding' (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010). Koester suggests that such 'accommodating down' may requires 'non-standard pronunciation or grammar, even if [speakers] are perfectly capable of producing the standard form as well'. On the other hand, if BELF users are talking to 'an equally or more fluent language user, they [do] not feel the need to adapt their communication' (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010).

3-2-2-2 Native English Speakers

Native speakers of English are part of the international business community where BELF is spoken. They play an important part in the BELF community as a result of the significant presence of the US in business worldwide and of the UK especially in European business. Presence of native speakers of English is, thus, a natural setting for international business communication and many researchers pay special attention to how native speakers influence English used as a lingua franca (e.g. Charles, 2007).

Some of the research (Du-Babcock & Babcock, 2007; Rogerson-Revell, 2008; Sweeney & Zhu, 2010) suggests that native speakers of English tend to be less sensitive to the need to accommodate to less proficient BELF users, and/or less successful in accommodating their use of English. As a result, other BELF users often find it difficult to understand native speakers' English. Rogerson-Revell claims that such difficulties arise from differences in speed and vocabulary choice, as well as from the use of unfamiliar expressions in native speaker's English (2008).

Although non-native BELF users generally feel that they do not need to speak at the same level as natives, admitting openly that they are not able to understand native speakers' speech, or requesting for clarification to native speakers is not always a realistic option. This is since doing so can be seen as being face losing, or as a display of weakness (Charles, 2007; Ehrenreich, 2010). Some researchers argue that native speakers sometimes use their competence as an instrument of power, and other BELF users find such native speakers irritating (Ehrenreich, 2010). According to Ehrenreich's research, especially in a situation of conflict, interactions with native speakers are considered particularly challenging among German managers, quoting an interview that '(native speakers') linguistic behaviour becomes more sophisticated, and….then, if you do not use language skilfully, you will find yourself at a considerable disadvantage' (Ehrenreich, 2010). However, in non-competitive situations, native speaker interactions are generally seen as much less of a problem.

3-2-2-3 BELF Competence

As BELF focuses more on the content of communication rather than forms, shared business knowledge and shared repertoires in their business context is crucial for BELF users to establish an understanding. Ehrenreich (2010) depicts how BELF users can understand message of counterparts of limited English because they share managerial and technical knowledge in business, so they can infer points while they can't make sense of the language linguistically, indicating that BELF users tend to use holistic top-down approaches based on their shared business repertories (2010).

In the same line, Kankaanranta et al. (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010) points out business knowledge as an integral and necessary part of competence in BELF. Their arguments indicate that the communication process of BELF is largely governed by 'business-related contextual parameters'. For instance, interviewees say that 'a number of interview questions concerning the use and their perceptions of English were too narrowly language-focused and could, in fact, only be answered in more global terms of business communication in general' (Ehrenreich, 2010). Therefore, research of BELF needs to have a wider scope than narrowly defined linguistics, to examine the significance of context and to explore the larger framework of global professional communication in its multilingual and multicultural context (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011).

3-2-2-4 Personal Relationships

Although BELF communications mainly focus on achieving goals of the business institutions to which users belong, some personal relationship building is considered as an essential part of BELF communication. While the importance of personal relationship is widely accepted in business in wider scopes such as building trust and common ground (Campbell, White & Johnson, 2003; Thomas, Zolin & Hartman, 2009), two functions of personal relationships are particularly crucial for BELF; one is to understand different cultural and linguistic backgrounds so that BELF users can be prepared for the gaps created by the different expectations and styles, and secondly to develop a cooperative relationship to better accommodate their English and negotiate meanings effectively.

For instance, Pullin (2010) shows how 'safe' small talk in BELF communication in a Swiss company helps BELF users to nurture solidarity, adopt a more conciliatory tone suitable to counterparts and to develop opportunities to temper with earlier conflicts. Ehrenreich (2010) illustrates that German managers find English spoken by some Chinese business partners especially difficult to understand. Nevertheless, as they know the counterparts as individual people, and are familiar with their English style through relational conversation, her participants became more efficient to understand content, in spite of supposed breakdowns in communication. Planken (2005) uses the framework of rapport management (Bargiela-Chiappini et al., 2007) and shows that experienced BELF users effectively use personal relationship messages in their e-mail communications better than inexperienced BELF users.

3-2-2-5 Attitude and competence in English

While English have been confirmed to be the indispensable for business people engaging in cross border business, BELF users' English is 'characterized by a high degree of diversity in terms of regional languacultural variation and levels of proficiency' (Ehrenreich, 2010: 414). Ehrenreich also points out that 'an optimistic conceptualization of ELF speakers as 'highly proficient' turns out to be a somewhat unjustified idealization' (2009: 145), and said some of the participants in her research are 'quite non-proficient or more generally, insecure communicators, causing more or less visible communicative problems of various kinds' (2009: 145). Rogerson-Revell's study (2007; 2008) on international business meetings revealed that some speakers who are less proficient in English actually find it difficult to voice their opinions during meetings. However, relationships between the difference of proficiency in English among BELF users and its effects on their perception among users are not explicitly studied further, because when proficiency of English is mentioned in BELF context, the discussions tend to become too simplified, often using the dichotomy of categorising native speakers and non-native speakers (Charles, 2007; Sweeney & Zhu, 2010).

Another dichotomy BELF researches tend to have is discussions of forms and contents. Although most BELF research confirms that grammatical 'correctness' is not a concern of BELF users, there remains limited research on the quality of BELF communication. Developing upon this, Kankaanranta and her colleagues' attempts to analyse BELF Competence (2010) and Louhiala-Salminen et al.'s study to conceptualise Global Communicative Competence (2011) are new approaches to develop theoretical frameworks on the quality of BELF communication. Kankaanranta et al. identify success factors of BELF communication based on user's own perceptions and they emerged as 1) clarity and accuracy of contents (rather than linguistic correctness), 2) knowledge of business-specific vocabulary and genre conventions (rather than only 'general' English) and 3) personal relationships. On top of that, Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2011) further suggest the notion of Global Communicative Competence (GCC). GCC consists of three layers: multicultural competence, competence in English as a Business Lingua Franca (BELF) and the communicator's business know-how (2011: 244). Their attempts to conceptualise BELF competence and Global Communicative Competence is a departure from the conventional dichotomies and consequently, is an intentional consolidation of linguistic aspects of ELF and strategic approaches of business communication studies.

Although BELF users face a variety of challenges, the majority of BELF users in research have shown that they are enjoying their international responsibilities and feel good about their business experience with people from different cultures (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010; Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011; Ehrenreich, 2009: 140, 2011). When Ehrenreich (2009: 139) interviewed managers of German MNCs, she was surprised by how self-confident and efficient they are in their use of ELF in the business community. For instance, German managers test English skills of job applicants with small chats in English during recruiting interviews, rather than using more formal ways such as test scores, because managers think they themselves are the best person to judge the 'appropriateness' of the applicant's English (Ehrenreich, 2009: 140).

3-4-2-6 Language and Power

'Language is a power-wielding instrument in organization' (Charles, 2007) and language has the ability to influence one's access to information and relationships with other people in the institution (Charles & Marschan-Piekkari, 2002). Marschan-Piekkari and her colleagues made an extensive investigation on MNCs based in Finland that had used English as a corporate language since the 1970s, and for 30 years by the time of the research (Charles & Marschan-Piekkari, 2002; Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999). The study illustrated that English can become both a barrier and facilitator, causing complex problems and impacts on individuals and organisations. They conclude that 'language is often used as an informal source of expert power in multinationals'. Charles (2007) also raises the issue of power and language skills, especially the significant disempowerment of people who have very limited skills in the language used, by saying that it is 'extraordinarily difficult to be professional' when one can only speak at a very limited level and such disempowerment is 'reflected in the way they perceive themselves as professionals and managers.'

3-2-2-7 Hybridity and multilingualism

One of the unique characteristics of BELF as a contact language of people of different mother tongues is its multilingual context. Reasons of choice of languages and effects of such choices have been discussed in several studies, in the form of communication with external clients, internal communication (e.g. Charles, 2007; Ehrenreich 2009; 2010) and, most of all, by looking at the choice of English as a corporate language (Fredriksson et al., 2006; Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005; Piekkari, Vaara, Tienari, & Säntti, 2005). As BELF interactions are among people of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, mother tongues and other languages play various roles in BELF communication. Explicitly, code switching and the use of metaphors in mother tongues are observed in BELF communications (Ehrenreich, 2010; Mondada, 2007; Cogo, 2012). More implicitly, BELF users 'bring into BELF situations their own cultural characteristics, and together create a 'new' operational culture based on the shared understanding of situational factors' (Charles, 2007).

In addition to such hybridity of BELF communication, Ehrenreich (2010) also stresses multilingualism of 'situationally motivated parallel use(s) of several languages' such as Russian slides were used for Russian visitors during the English presentation to support visitors' comprehension, or a quick exchange in mother tongues were made during meetings in English. Use of clients' own language for small talk or greetings is often exercised as a means of showing consideration and maintaining relations with customers in MNCs (Ehrenreich, 2010). Thus skills of client's language and understanding of others' national culture is taken as advantageous.

For internal communication, Ehrenreich used a term 'linguistic respect' to explain the unwritten rule of the German company she studied, which is to shift to English from German if any of the participants in the meeting do not understand German. Sometimes, however, this organisational commitment is unproductive. In some occasions more than ten Germans, most of them with very poor command of English, struggled to speak in English about complex technical matters just because one American or Chinese was present in the meeting (2009: 139; 2010). For internal communications, some use of English even among the people with the same mother tongue (e.g. Dutch and Finnish as discussed by Fredriksson et al., 2007 and Louhiala-Salminen, 2002) was observed, but English is practically never used within Germans-only groups, because speaking in German is easier and more efficient for the Germans (Ehrenreich, 2010).

The choice of English as a corporate language by MNCs is a more dynamic issue of BELF study, as pioneered by Marschan-Piekkari et al. (1999; 2002), followed by the case studies in Finn and Swedish mergers (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005). They illustrate the influences of choice of language on power and relationships in individual and organisational levels. When the Finnish MNC first chooses Swedish as a corporate language, Finnish employees suddenly felt 'stripped of power' feeling that they are inferior in meetings because they could only speak 'halting (although in many cases actually very fluent) Swedish'. Finnish employees welcomed the company's decision to change its corporate language to English. They felt that using English was fairer, given that it is neither the mother tongue of the Swedes, nor that of the Finns.

3-2-2-8 Communities of Practice

The concept of 'community of practice' (CofP, Wenger, 1998) emerges as a useful framework for discussing the nature of BELF practice and how the members learn and go through different CofPs in their professional career. Following the discussion of CofP in ELF contexts (Seidlhofer, 2007), Ehrenreich (2009) discusses the CofP framework in the BELF context in detail, based on her ethnographic study of German MNCs. She argues that three dimensions of CofP defined by Wenger (1998: 72) rightly fit into the nature of BELF users, namely; 1) sharing goals, 2) mutual interactions to achieve the goals, and 3) sharing repertoire through interactions. Koester (2010) also adopts the CofP framework to discuss business communication, and argues that the domain of international business is widely different in terms of size, linguacultural background and hierarchical levels and the particular 'relevance systems' specific in their task including 'appropriateness' of their language-related practices may vary significantly among CofPs.

BELF users often have simultaneous memberships in several CofPs, such as business divisions and project teams consisting of colleagues, partners, or clients from different divisions or companies from different countries. Individual professionals learn how to cope with the diversified challenges of using BELF at each CofP most effectively through practice, or by 'learning by doing' (Ehrenreich, 2009: 10). Consequently, professionals are 'expected to have willingness to develop one's English skills further through their practice' in order to become fully functional members in their respective CofPs (Ehrenreich, 2010). Thus, professionals in business international communities are often life-long learners of English in practice, 'moving in and out of different ELF speaking CofPs as well as adopting to and actively shaping their communities' socially shared repertoires' (Ehrenreich, 2010).

3-2-3 Issues in BELF research in Europe

As discussed so far, the general trend of BELF research in Northern and Central European countries is BELF users' positive attitudes and relative success in BELF communication. Furthermore, BELF communications are observed as being generally harmonious and collaborative. It is, however, not yet clear whether this positivity could be characteristics of BELF users in general, or whether European BELF researchers tend to study relatively successful international business people, such as managers of corporations, and they are successful because they are good at using English. As discussed, some researchers (Koester, 2010; Porcini, 2002) take a position to focus on success factors rather than on miscommunication and this intention of researchers may be contributing to the positive trends.

Additionally, the difficulty of access to authentic communication may also influence such trends. European workplace discourse research tends to focus on authentic and real-life discourses (Koester, 2010; Bargiela-Chiappini et al., 2007). Unfortunately, authentic business communications are difficult for researchers to access due to confidentiality of business entities (Louhiala-Salminen, 2002; Cheng, 2009). Most of the texts being analysed in past research are less confidential communication such as information sharing (Rogerson-Revell, 2007) or relation making (Planken, 2005), concentrating more on internal communication within companies rather than external (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005). These communications are, by nature, more co-operative and friendly. Meanwhile, many of the crucial or high stake communications such as profit related meetings or external negotiations, which tend to be more competitive and confidential in nature, have been rarely studied. Therefore, it is unknown if collaborative features of BELF communication discussed above are just as applicable to competitive talk (Ehrenreich, 2009: 146), or more 'critical moments' in business.

Another potential issue of BELF research, especially these based on business discourse analysis, is the difficulty of interpreting discourses and speculating the judgements which participants make. As mentioned earlier, one of the most significant characteristics of business communication is that users usually have clear ideas on what they want to achieve through the communication, but such goals based in users' minds are often inexplicit in the discourse. The discourse, genre and corpus analyses of ELF or BELF research have shown that intelligibility can actively and effectively be achieved by non-native (B)ELF users (e.g. Pitzl, 2005). However, whether BELF users' communication goals have been achieved is rarely discussed because it is difficult to understand from the analysis of texts. Therefore, in order to evaluate the success of BELF communication, further research from BELF users' perspectives is needed to investigate how effective their communication is in achieving their goals.

Furthermore, it is almost impossible to find the issue of unsaid messages from the analysis of texts. For instance, silent interlocutors may not choose to be silent themselves, but they may be silent because they cannot take a turn, or are unable to find a suitable sentence in English to illustrate their point. Indeed, Marschan-Piekkari et al's (1999) study of over 100 people's interviews working at Finn MNCs found that English often plays a role as a gatekeeper for participating in meetings and training conducted in English. However, discourse analysis would not reveal such information, and it would be difficult to find such issues unless researchers become sensitive to such possibilities.

BELF users' own judgement, their emic point of view, and feelings such as confidence, comfortableness, or satisfaction, could be revealed only when subjective judgement or perception of participants are spoken. For instance, Bargiela-Chiappini reviews a case of discourse analysis on a videotaped seemingly successful meeting. However, the strong negative feedback by Chinese participants in the post-meeting interviews suggested otherwise (Bargiela-Chiappini et al. 2007: 43). Although some empirical researches have covered perceptions of individual BELF users (Kankaanranta et al., 2010; Ehrenreich, 2010), more micro-analysis of BELF users' emic points of view are needed in order to capture detailed characteristics of BELF communications.

Another issue which seems to have been overlooked in BELF research is some 'side-effects', or 'costs' of using English as a contact language and their effects on BELF users. Ehrenreich briefly mentions that German managers said that they occasionally feel 'a substantial loss of detail' and find it more tiring when they have to use English in their important meetings (2010: 421). Such productivity and quality issues in communication need to be studied further because such issues could directly be affecting productivity and quality of performance of businesses, and consequently, also be affecting perceptions and attitudes towards using English in businesses. More efforts, therefore, need to be made to uncover the variety of possible 'hidden problems' (House, 1999) and discrepancies between 'appearance' and 'perception'.

Most of the BELF studies are case studies of one or a few corporations, focusing on the micro-perspective of the BELF community, and a larger picture of BELF practice has not yet been presented. As a result, differences and similarities in communication practices and users' attitudes among different groups of business professionals are hardly understood in a range of BELF users. For instance, Ehrenreich's study (2010) convincingly presents German senior managers' attitude in a German MNC, but as she reminds the reader, her findings are only valid within her research context. Ehrenreich notes that further research is needed to gain 'a better understanding of the differences and similarities between different groups of business professionals' (2010: 428). The attitudes of BELF users depend upon a large number of factors, such as profession, personal background (e.g. age, education history, and history of use of BELF) and organisational/business environment. Among these, an important yet particularly under researched factor is where BELF users grow up and are educated, especially given that most existing studies exclusively focus on Northern Europe. Even within the EU, very little BELF research is available in other parts of Europe (rare examples are Deneire's (2008) research in France and Poncini's (2002) study in Italy). Comparative research across regions might yield interesting insights because the portion of the confident users among the populations are significantly different among countries (as discussed Chapter 1-4, Figure 1), both within and outside of the EU.

3-3 BELF in Asia

When attention is shifted to Asian countries, it is clear that the global spread of English has had significant impacts in the region. There are many studies that attempt to explore the implications of the global spread of English for Asian countries in their business contexts. Namely, in India and the Philippines, call centres and IT related businesses are prospering by taking advantage of the large pool of workers who are highly proficient in English, creating new opportunities locally (Cowie, 2007; Friedman, 2005; Pal & Buzzanell, 2008). For Singapore, the population's high proficiency in English has made the country successful in becoming a 'hub' of IT, Finance, Trading and Aviation, and, as a result the country has become a popular place for many American and European MNCs to base their head office in Asia (Alsagoff, 2010; Shiraki, 2006). This has been a marked shift from a time when a large proportion of the Asian head offices were located in Tokyo. While these three countries have enjoyed substantial economic gains due to high proficiency in English amongst the population, some countries' language policies are characterised by emphasise of multilingual language proficiencies. Nair-Venugopal (2000) illustrates how Malaysian business people use two languages with frequent code switching and mix Bahasa Malay and English, whilst Bhatia (2008) and Cheng (2009) illustrate the trilingualism of HK professionals, who use Cantonese, English and Putonhua, or mandarin Chinese in business contexts. Furthermore, in Eastern Asia, especially China and Korea, a large volume of studies have been produced about national English policy as well as the use of English in business contexts (Jung, 2009; Pang, Zhou & Fu, 2002; Zhu & Li, 2009). It appears to be the case that this has been the result of drastic changes in the English education system in these countries over the past two decades. In general, the following two phenomena in Asia seems to have considerable impacts on the environment surrounding BELF users in Japan.

The first phenomenon is the change of language policy that has been observed in China, Taiwan, and especially Korea. These changes have been regarded by many researchers and business people in Japan as a 'success case' for producing a large pool of young business people who are fluent in English and they are believed to have been contributing to these countries' economic leap (Nakamura, 2012). Such perceptions have led to Japanese business leaders pressurising policymakers into adopting radical reforms in the education system in Japan, so that Japanese companies are not left behind by other Asian countries in business competition.

The second phenomenon is that a group of Asian global professionals are playing key roles in Asian international business. The previously mentioned movement of head offices of MNCs to Singapore has contributed to an increase in the number of Singaporean professionals who are successful in communicating within the multinational corporate system (Shiraki, 2006). For instance, in Siemens, a German based MNC which uses English as its corporate language, Singaporeans have little trouble communicating in English (Shiraki, 2006). The combination of an Asian background and high proficiency in English has resulted in Singaporeans successfully occupying executive positions in Siemens subsidiaries across Asia. Competent English speaking professionals from other Asian countries also have access to the MNCs' worldwide career ladder and it is becoming increasingly important for American and European companies to promote Asian professionals among Asian offices as expatriates, and nowadays, their top management team also often includes Asians. This is a situation where Japanese business people may be situated in if they work for global MNCs in Asia.

3-4 Business English in Japan

Based on the discussion of English in Japan as the background of this research in Chapter 1-3, this section further discusses literature on the business communication in English in the Japanese business context. In Japan, research on English communication in business contexts has a long history of being motivated by the practical needs of trading and international business with a focus on intercultural communications with Western countries, especially the USA. On the other hand, empirical or descriptive research on business communication beyond the Western countries is very limited, let alone studies adopting the ELF or BELF framework. Therefore, I firstly review research on English communication by Japanese business people in general, in order to gain an understanding of the environments surrounding Japanese business people, followed by specific reviews on how the BELF framework has been discussed and applied in the field.

3-4-1 History

Since the beginning of the 20th century, 'trading English' or 'business English', which focuses on the terminology and pattern of English usage in businesses, has been taught and studied extensively to respond to the practical needs of the export driven Japanese international business. As the Japanese economy grew rapidly, there was an accumulation of theoretical, speculative, and empirical studies of business English in Japanese settings motivated by the needs for professional training (Hilton, 1992; Tanaka, 2009). Up to the 1990s, English communication with native English speakers, especially with Americans (Yamada, 1997; Sullivan & Kameda, 1982) was a major interest for researchers in the field of 'business English'.

However, although little attention has been given to business communication research, English has long been used by Japanese business people with non-native English speakers extensively, particularly in Asia and Europe. Kameda's research (1995) clearly provides evidence of this, with 56.5% of participants in his study (n=154) using English as a lingua franca in Asian business practices. Yoshihara (2002) also confirmed that English is the most used language during meetings with non-Japanese participants in the overseas subsidiaries of Japanese MNCs not only in North America, but also in Europe and Asia.

3-4-2 Macro perspective

Research on business English communication by Japanese people can be reviewed from both a macro and micro perspective. The former looks at Japanese companies' adoption of English into their organisations from a corporate perspective, whilst the latter focuses on how individual Japanese business people use English situated in macro-environments.

As discussed in Chapter 2, in the public debate, the belief that financial success in a global economy requires the mastery of English for both individuals and global organisations has been widely circulated by journalists and become mere dogma. Reports from the business community often lament Japanese firms' reluctance to adopt English and its struggles doing so. Yoshihara and his colleagues are one of the few who have studied the issue empirically. Yoshihara argues that many MNCs from Europe are quick to adopt English as their corporate language solely or partially, but Japanese companies are not as quick as their European counterparts and as such, the slow pace of adoption of English provides an explanation for why Japanese companies are 'lagging behind' in globalisation (e.g. Yoshihara, 2002). Furthermore, this slow adoption of English into Japanese organisations is attributed to the reluctance of Japanese business people to use English, and to the insufficient English competence among Japanese people, a familiar discourse I discussed in Chapter 1. Several studies further point out that the number of Japanese business people who are able to use in English at work is not sufficient enough to cover the needs of firms who seek employees who can do business with non-Japanese speakers (e.g. Koiso, 2009).

Another quantitative study (Koike, Terauchi, Takada & Matsui, 2010) finds that more than 60% of users of English at work feel their English proficiency is not up to the level where they can handle their responsibilities. The report shows that the business English users' level of proficiency varies widely. Most business users feel that they can usually manage simple communications in English. However, the majority of 'lower proficiency' users as well as some of the 'higher proficiency' users feel they have problems in handling complex communications, especially in speaking and writing, although not so much in reading (2010: 49-50).

Terasawa's research (2011) shows a different angle to the case. Using an existing questionnaire survey (n=17,253), he shows that the vast majority of people who consider themselves able to use English at a level 'good enough for business' are actually using English at work. On the other hand, out of the people who do not use English at work, only a minimal portion are confident users of English. From this, it can be inferred that two factors may contribute to the situation. The students who are relatively strong in English at the end of their education and who are minorities among their peer students are likely to choose a career which may need English at work. Furthermore, those who are in career paths which need English tend to develop their English competence over their career while others who do not use English show little progress.

It is also worthwhile reviewing why researchers in the field of business domain argue that Japanese companies 'need' to adopt English more widely, in spite of the 'reluctance of Japanese employees' to use English at work. Okabe and her colleagues (Okabe, 2009; Yoshihara, Okabe & Sawaki, 2000) use the framework of 'costs of language policies' to explain the issue of language choice in Japanese corporations operating outside of Japan. They argue that the dominant use of Japanese in Japanese organisations incur costs to corporations, such as the lost opportunity to utilise non-Japanese talents and opportunities for outsourcing, lost local knowledge accumulated in overseas subsidiaries, and expenses of translations. They report that in many Japanese MNCs, corporate communications, especially at higher levels, is mainly in the Japanese language because of the limited proficiency of English among Japanese business people and their inflexible organisation and human resource management systems. Such arguments echo the widely spread notion among scholars in the American business schools (see for example, Neeley, 2011) that adopting English into corporate communication is a necessary means to establish speedy and direct communication throughout companies and that it is the only way to integrate the business across multiple nations and operate effectively worldwide.

In such an environment, Sumida Corporation, studied by Yoshihara (2001), was a pioneer in adopting English as their corporate language worldwide, including at their Japanese head office, in order to run their global business. The CEO took two years to implement the scheme, and during the two years, he offered English training programmes to employees, as the 'majority of employees were not able to use English at all'. A decade later, an internet company Rakuten attracted significant attention in Japan when the CEO announced that it would adopt English as the corporate language for all employees in any location in all communication with anybody. The

CEO, Mr Mikitani, is a high profile entrepreneur and an advocator of English education reformations in Japan. According to Neeley's study of Rakuten (Neeley, 2011, 2012), all of the 7100 employees in Tokyo needed to transit from their native language Japanese to 'English, the global language of business'. Mikitani informed all employees that they had to achieve a certain score on the TOEIC exam within two years, and those who did not work hard enough would risk demotion. Neeley analyses that as a consequence of 'Englishnization', many of the company's employees 'may feel at a disadvantage' and 'team dynamics and performance can suffer and national pride can get in the way'. However, she justifies the change as English is almost always common ground and notes that 'there is no question that unrestricted multilingualism is inefficient for important interactions and for achieving key goals' (2012: 117).

Neeley's position of 'English only for global business' represents one of the typical positions held by American business and American business schools, and such discourses have gained increasing support within the Japanese business community. This is reflected in the Japanese government's proposal for needs of developing 'Global Human Resources' (METI 2010). The employees of Rakuten and Sumida Corporation must have faced enormous challenges adapting to these drastic changes, but very little attention has been given to employees' perspectives in these studies.

Blazejewski's (2006) case study of a Japanese subsidiary of a German MNC, which adopted English as its corporate language worldwide, illustrates more details of changes among employees. Blazejewski calls the adoption of English as 'a trigger to conflict', saying that the adoption of English as a lingua franca reshuffles the power structure considerably and cause conflict within the Japanese organisation. According to the researcher, the main conflict is the splitting of the organisation between those who speak English, who are typically younger and less experienced in business, and those who have little or no English skills, who tend to be older and occupy middle management positions in Japan. Those who are not able to speak English feel increasingly excluded from the MNC communication network as they can no longer fully participate in many management meetings being held in English.

3-4-3 Micro perspective

The above 'macro' picture of the adaptation of English as the corporate language in Japanese organisations illustrates that since English is increasingly being used as a global lingua franca for business, Japanese business people may be unexpectedly put into a position to use English regardless of their preference. In the case of Sumida corporation (Yoshihara, 2001), employees were expected to become able to use English in two years from a 'not at all' level of English; if not, he or she may be regarded as incompetent in working for the company. In Tanaka's study (2006), some of the less proficient users of English quit the company after the introduction of English as a corporate language. In the following section, I would like to further explore focusing on individual perspectives of business people and how they deal with the needs of using English as a business language.

The impact on individual employees created by the adoption of English may be analysed from a perspective of 'language costs' (Okabe, 2009; Yoshihara, Okabe & Sawaki 2000). According to this perspective, the transformation of the corporate language from Japanese to English can be explained as shifting a large part of 'language costs' from the hands of the corporation to the hands of individuals. When the corporate language is Japanese, MNCs need to bear large parts of the 'costs of language in international businesses', which exist in the forms of hiring translators, translating documents and lost opportunities to utilise local talents. When English is adopted, these explicit costs of language for companies are drastically reduced, but instead, individual employees need to bear largely implicit costs of using English as a business lingua franca. In other words, individual employees may face increased 'costs' in the forms of the needs of studying English to meet the target set by the company and being pressurised to use English instead of Japanese. The in-depth analysis of individuals' 'cost of language' has been conducted by Okabe and her colleagues (Okabe, 2009; Yoshihara et al., 2000). Based on her interviews with Japanese managers, four problems have been identified; 1) more time is needed to conduct their work in English, 2) less people make contributions in English, such as speaking at meetings or expressing their opinions in writing, 3) the quality of discussion or decision making is degraded, and 4) much higher stress levels are felt by the Japanese. Based on the findings, Okabe and her colleagues (Okabe, 2009; Yoshihara et al., 2004) argue that the use of either Japanese or English have both pros and cons, and the bilingual management, or making strategic use of the two languages in flexible ways, could be a more realistic option for Japanese companies.

Koike et al.'s research (Koike, Terauchi & Takada, 2008) argues that the majority of Japanese English users' perceive their use of English to be 'unsecure'. Tanaka also reports, in his conclusion of the case study of ELF meetings (2006), that Japanese business people are disempowered and made emotionally uncomfortable because of their relatively weak English competence and their transfer of Japanese business discourse patterns into the English meeting. Blazejewski (2006) illustrates complex feelings amongst Japanese business people. Those who do not have sufficient English skills find it 'too embarrassing' to admit that they do not have the necessary competencies in English and, whenever possible, avoid situations where their English skills are noticed by others. They complain among peers, but remain silent on the topic officially.

Above discussion suggest that Japanese companies face a dilemma. When competing against non-Japanese companies which use English as a corporate language, Japanese companies are pressured to adopt English widely. However, if English is used as a corporate language, or used in wider situations, such moves may incur negative impacts on individual employees. The widely spread discourse to respond to such a dilemma is to improve English proficiency of Japanese business people, for both existing business people and for the future workforce (METI, 2010). While many companies provide in-house English training or incentives for improving English to their employees, business communities have also published repeated proposals for changes to the higher education system as discussed in Chapter 1-2. They believe that more practical English education should be provided so that a larger number of Japanese students are able to use English at business level (Keizai Doyukai, 2012; Keidanren, 2000b; 2011).

3-4-4 Cultural perspective

In addition to the competence of English amongst Japanese business people, the uniqueness of the 'Japanese culture' is also a focus of business communication research amongst Japanese researchers. The cultural behaviour, social systems, and the management style in Japan have been one of the main focuses of studies of Japan, and these cultural differences have been vigorously debated since the 1970s with 'the unique culture of Japan' framework (Doi, 1984; Nakane, 1970). Yamada's study (1997) is one of the earliest pieces of research which combines the angle of the uniqueness of Japanese business communication with a sociolinguistic approach based on solid empirical data. Tanaka and Du-Babcock (Du-Babcock & Tanaka, 2010) studied differences in culture between Japanese and Hong Kong Chinese professionals. They found that turn taking illustrates distinctive differences in communication styles during meetings in English as a lingua franca. The Japanese are observed less frequent in turn taking with less speaking time, and tend to wait for longer to express their opinions and are less direct when raising disagreements.

In his research on Renault-Nissan business meetings (Tanaka, 2008), where English is used as a lingua franca between the French and the Japanese, Tanaka shows that the Japanese tend to remain silent due to 'weak linguistic competence' and also the Japanese corporate culture of harmony and solidarity. This silence, he analyses, is misinterpreted by French managers as consent to their proposal, rather than a difference in communication style. Furthermore, Tanaka analyses that Japanese participants tend to take shorter, less frequent turns, which leaves them disempowered. He argues that the power relation potentially generated by their linguistic competences and the lack of awareness of inter-cultural communication, among the Japanese participants could negatively affect the Japanese when decision making in meetings.

Kameda is another researcher who has studied the impacts of differences in culture for Japanese business people in English communication. He was a pioneer in the investigation of the role of English as a business lingua franca in Asia for Japanese business people (Kameda & Sullivan, 1995), and he studied business meetings in English as a lingua franca among Singapore professionals and Japanese managers (Kameda, 2001; 2002). He argued that the application of the 'Japanese style' into English communication is the main cause of communication issues, rather than their perceived 'bad English' which he argues is 'sufficient' in their business contexts. He lists salient styles of Japanese communication, such as indirect expressions and expectations for counterparts to 'figure out the parts that [are] left unsaid', and reports that they are noticed as problematic by Singaporean professionals (2001: 55). In his more recent articles (Kameda, 2012; 2013; 2014), Kameda introduces the term BELF as a new theoretical framework developed in Europe to recognise that English is used increasingly among non-native speakers of English, and proposes that BELF needs to be different from English as a native language. He argues that BELF should be simpler and tolerant to a variety of cultures. Specifically, he argues that 'Easterners' have different cultural background from that of 'Westerners' and in BELF communication, both of the cultural aspects should be respected. It is interesting that Kameda sees the 'unique culture of Japanese' as rather problematic aspects in business communication in English in his early study (1995; 2001), but, by adopting the concept of BELF, he is now advocating that English as a lingua franca in Asia and Middle East should be apart from traditional value of Western countries (Kameda, 2014). He argues that 'consideration for others and understanding of different perspectives' is essential for effective communication in BELF. He is probably the first researcher in Japan who makes his argument using the framework of 'BELF'. More recently, a few more researchers have begun to adopt the BELF perspective as a theoretical framework which may empower Japanese business English users (Fujio, 2014). Takamori (2011) refers to the case of Rakuten where Globish is positively accepted, and uses the example to argue that simplified versions of English may be an option in BELF communication for Japanese business people who find learning English too difficult.

3-4-5 Focus of researchers

Looking back on the review of literature about Japanese business English users so far, there is a clear trend in the above research to focus primarily on miscommunication or problems rather than success, and this is strikingly different from the trend of BELF research in Europe, especially in Northern and Central European countries. This trend appears to be based on the widely spread assumption that the Japanese in general are not as successful in communicating in English as other non-native English speakers as discussed in Chapter 1-3. Searches for reasons and solutions for the 'poor competence of' Japanese business people seem to be a widely shared theme as a given agenda.

For instance, Tanaka conducted an ethnographical analysis for both American owned and French owned companies (2006; 2008, respectively) which previously operated as stand-alone Japanese companies and both changed its corporate language from Japanese to English as a result of the acquisition. He draws similar conclusions for both cases, arguing that both limited proficiency of English and differences of 'ideologies' imbedded in language negatively influenced the power of Japanese professionals. Another interesting study is Tanaka's comparison of the ethnographical research in Japanese companies owned by the French with the ethnographical research in Scandinavia and Germany (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2006; Ehrenreich, 2009; 2010; 2011). This could be done because as all of the cases focus on the impact of the adoption of English as a corporate language. The Japanese case provides a picture of problematic communication in English while the Scandinavian and German cases emphasise successes of communication and the confidence of users, illustrating a strong contrast. However, I would like to be cautious of concluding that English users in Japan and in Europe are strikingly different, because there may be other factors which may influence the research, rather the differences in culture, or nationality. For instance, the difference may be caused by other business factors in which these companies are embedded in. The Japanese company in Tanaka's research was acquired by a non-Japanese company and the top level management as well as management systems were replaced, including the change of corporate language. Scandinavian companies in the research acquired other companies outside of their countries and changed the corporate language, but the management teams and management style were not changed drastically. Therefore, it is clear that when the perception and attitude of BELF users are studied, close attention should be paid to the context, especially business environments in which they are situated.

So far, the overall tone of research on English use by Japanese business people has been rather problematic. However, Japan had been the second largest economic power in the world until recently, and the products and services made in Japan are spread all over the world. This raises the question of how most of the business communication by Japanese could be so problematic and unsuccessful. It may be true that Japanese people have a problem of low competence in English skills, or that the Japanese may have a distinctively unique culture, but there must be a large number of business people who successfully function in the global market to overcome these 'problems'. This is one of the questions which have not been answered well in the previous research in the field of business communication of Japanese people.

3-4-6 Multilingual perspective

Although the hybridity of the BELF communication is an interest of BELF researchers especially in Europe, it has not been explored sufficiently in the most of the existing studies of Japanese business people. In the previous chapter, I argued that Japanese people who grew up and were educated in the Japanese education system 'cannot be free from the influence of Japanese' (Chapter 2-2-2), citing Yanase (2010), even when they are using English. I also analysed Japanese people's multilingual resources, as conceptualised by Blommaert (2010), and found that they could be characterised by a dominant presence of very strong and nearly all round Japanese language resource and a very minor presence of a patchy, limited repertoire of English language, at least at the beginning of their professional career (Chapter 2-2-2). Koike et al.'s study (2008) reports that some business English users consider Japanese communication skills the foundation of their English communication, especially in developing logical arguments (2008: 113-114). Such arguments infer that Japanese people's English communication is not isolated from their language resources in Japanese, and some people consider that they utilise their 'multilingual resources' when they communicate in English.

Additionally, in this chapter, I have illustrated that communications in Japanese business organisations are seldom monolingual (Chapter 3 3-4-2). In Japanese organisations, Japanese professionals have multiple options for language choice and they usually choose adequate language(s) from Japanese, English and the local language, depending on the linguistic skills of those involved. As Okabe et al. (Okabe, 2009; Yoshihara et al., 2000) suggest, in many Japanese international corporations, English and Japanese are used in a flexible manner. This indicates that when Japanese business English users execute some business tasks, several languages are used jointly or in parallel. I have not found any research focusing on this hybridity of business communication among Japanese business people, and hybrid or multilingual communication by Japanese business people should be explored further in this paper.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed research on BELF and business communication conducted in North and Central Europe, in Asia and most importantly in Japan, and discussed significant findings and issues. In summary, I argue that the number and scope of research on Japanese people's use of

English at work is very limited, even though study of this field in the globalised era is arguably essential and highly influential for language policy development and English education policy and planning in Japan. I discussed several unanswered questions so far by looking at researchers studying business communication in English. Afterwards, I presented three main points to pay particular attention to in my position as a researcher. These are to pay close attention to business context, to be open to both failure and success, and to pay attention to the multilingual practices. Finally, but most importantly, I argued that studying subjective perceptions of BELF users could complement existing research mainly focusing on discourses produced by BELF users. As far as I have found, the voice of Japanese users of English are still unheard or have not given the attention they deserve, not only in the research literature written in English, but even in research literature written in Japanese. In the following chapter, I shift my discussion to the methodology of the present research.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 1 and 2, the epistemological orientation of this research is to critically explore the phenomenon of BELF through BELF users' subjective views. In order to achieve this, I searched extensively for an appropriate methodology that enabled me to listen to BELF users' own voices, which had been relatively marginalised in much of the existing research. My initial interest in the narrative approach originated when I learned that it has played a key role in the field of medical and nursing research, in a movement in which researchers have re-examined the widely accepted traditional norms shared among the medical specialists. The narrative approach played a critical role for researchers to centre the voices of patients and demonstrate how these patients' sense makings of their medical experiences in the context of their own lives is different from medical specialists' sense makings (detailed discussion in Chapter 4-2-1). Although the field of study is very different, I was inspired by the proven power of the narrative approach in that field. This encounter has led me to explore further what the narrative approach means and how it might be applied to realise my aims in this research.

In this chapter, firstly I introduce the main characteristics of the narrative approach and how this approach has been used in various fields of human and social sciences. This is followed by a discussion of why the narrative approach is appropriate for my research and how the methodological design was developed in order to effectively answer the research questions raised in Chapter 1. I then describe how the narrative approach has been applied in this research, clarifying the processes of developing the in-depth interview design, the sampling strategies and how actual interviews were implemented. This chapter ends with a discussion on specific characteristics of this research that sets it apart from the mainstream narrative research in the field of applied linguistics, and some limitations of this research methodology.

4-1 Narrative inquiry

4-1-1 Conceptualisation of the narrative

As a subtype of qualitative research, the narrative inquiry has been flourishing in a number of disciplines, ranging from social sciences and humanities to medical studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In both social and human sciences, the narrative inquiry has been recognised as an alternative, yet legitimate research method in the past few decades (Todeva & Cenoz, 2009). In the social sciences, the 'narrative turn' has been widely recognised (Barkhuizen, 2013; Chase, 2011; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Riessman, 2008) and has brought about a renewed interest in the role that it plays in social interaction and society.

In this research I use the term 'narrative inquiry' to discuss the broadly defined field of the qualitative research method, focusing on collecting narratives as data and analysing narrative data with a focus on the narrative character (Chase, 2003). Widely used alternatives to the term 'narrative inquiry' (Barkhuizen & Hacker, 2008; Bell, 2002; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2007; Norton & Early, 2011) include narrative research (Barkhuizen, 2013; Polkinghorne, 2007), narrative approach (Barkhuizen, 2007; Craig, 2007; Vihakara, 2006), and narrative analysis (Menard-Warwick, 2011; Pavlenko, 2008; Viney & Bousfield, 1991), while some researchers simply use the term narrative(s) (Bruner, 1987; 1991; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008; De Fina, 2009). Many use the terms interchangeably, although other scholars give each term more specific definitions. I used the term 'narrative inquiry' in this research because it is the most common among scholars. Furthermore, it bears no connection to a specific field or group of scholars who use narratives as part of their research method. I consider the narrative inquiry as a way of listening to or colleting stories of participants regarding a specific theme (Yamada 2007: 16), allowing the researcher to accumulate data and explore how participants make meanings of their experiences over time (Yamada 2007; Bruner 1986; Pavlenko 2002).

4-1-2 Definition of the narrative inquiry

While the narrative inquiry could be roughly defined as above, when it is conceptualised more precisely as a subtype of qualitative inquiry, the meaning of narratives and narrative inquiry is notoriously hard to define (Barkhuizen, 2013), and as a result, far from agreed upon (Barkhuizen 2011; Stanley & Temple 2008). Chase emphasises this point by saying that '(f)or years, humanities and social science scholars have debated the nature and significance of narrative(s)' and 'they disagree about what constitutes narratives and develop divergent approaches' (Chase, 2003: 273). In other words, narratives or the narrative inquiry in discussion of qualitative methodology is defined and treated differently by researchers from a variety of disciplines, and as such, analytical frameworks used by researchers are also diversified to meet the needs of their research objectives (Riessman, 2008).

4-1-3 Characteristics of the narrative inquiry

In the following part, I discuss the main characteristics of the narrative inquiry, as these characteristics were an indispensable component of considerations when the research design was developed.

4-1-3-1 Focusing on experiences

The essential characteristic of the narrative inquiry is its focus on experiences or events told as stories. Experiences or events in the narratives are selected, organised, connected and evaluated as a meaningful story by a storyteller for a listener. In this way, the narrative inquiry as a subset of qualitative research, has distinguished itself from other approaches due to its primary interest in exploring experiences as narrated by those who live them (Chase, 2011; Bell, 2002; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 2; Barkhuizen, 2011; 2013: 4; Riessman, 2008). The central interest in narrative inquiries is how individuals 'make meanings' of their experiences (Barkhuizen & Benson, 2008; Sakurai 2002; Yamada, 2007; Chase 2011; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Thus, the 'narrative shows that a person's experiences shape the way he or she sees the world' (Bell, 2011), since meaning making of experiences is 'a way of understating one's own or other's actions' (Chase, 2011). The narrative inquiry can give us an explanation of why a person acted as he/she did (Polkinghorne, 1995), and as such, the narrative inquiry is a powerful method for exploring the subjective view of individuals and their own sense making of significant experiences.

4-1-3-2 Inquiry of perception

Another salient characteristic of narrative inquiries is that '(t)he researchers' primary aim is not to discover whether narrators' accounts are accurate reflections of actual events, but to understand the meanings people attach to those events' (Chase 2011: 424). In other words, there is no such thing as an 'only one-true' narrative. Referring to oral history research on wartime history, Chase argues that the narrative research has challenged an idea of 'absolute truth and objectivity' in the debate about the 'truth' and 'evidence' taking place in oral history and historiography (Riessman, 2008: 186). The qualitative research placed its focus on 'the world of lived experience', 'where individual belief and action is intersect with culture' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011: 2), which contrasted with the traditional assumptions that there are objective facts and subjective judgements. With this shift, researchers increased their interest in the narrative inquiry, which had proven its legitimacy by capturing the complexity of life experiences, and achieving accountability through 'thick' descriptions (Geertz, 1973; Denzin, 2001; Yamada, 2007: 22). This means that it is not only unnecessary, but also impossible to search for the objective 'truth' of the experiences or events told by participants. Rather, my focus should be on how they 'perceive' and make sense of their experiences. By doing so, their narratives would help me to understand how they perceive and make sense of their use of English.

4-1-3-3 Co-Constructiveness

The narrative researchers emphasise that narratives are socially situated. Treating interviews as an encounter in which knowledge is actively constructed between an interviewer and an interviewee, rather than constructed solely individually by an interviewee, suggests that interviewing itself is situated in the social environment. Narratives are powerfully shaped by social, cultural, and historical conventions as well as by the relationship between the researcher and the participants (Pavlenko, 2002). Furthermore, Denzin and Lincoln stress that 'any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race and ethnicity' (2011: 12), and thus, an interview is not a clear insight into the inner life of an individual and into events occurring in society. Therefore, narrative inquiries need to pay great attention to how and what meanings are collaboratively produced within the situated circumstances of the particular interview (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Sakurai explains that critical listening of audio recordings of interviews makes this point especially clear by questioning whether the interviewee would have told different stories had the interviewer asked different questions, given different cues or responded differently during the interview (Sakurai 2002: 55).

This meant that I needed to pay careful attention to how I develop personal relationships with the interviewees before and during the interviews, through not only the questions that I was asking and but also my reactions to their stories, including how I showed my feeling of agreement, empathy and surprise.

4-1-3-4 Situated in contexts

Narratives, by their very nature, are social, relational and situated in contexts. In the above section, I discussed that narratives are situated in the interview context, therefore, are co-constructive. Simultaneously, they are also situated in the contexts of the narrator's world. Storied narratives are situated in the complex contexts of the experience they talk about and thus 'preserves the complexity of human action' (Polkinghorne, 1995). Therefore, narratives cannot be separated from the sociocultural and sociohistorical contexts from which they emerged (Johnson & Golombek, 2002), meaning that the exploration of an individual's experience in a narrative inquiry can be complex, diverse and multi-dimensional. Another characteristic of the narrative inquiry is that it is situated in the chronology of experiences told by an individual

(Creswell, 2002). An individual reflects upon and explores their experiences of the past, considering how these experiences contribute to present and future experiences (Polkinghorne, 1995). As an individual accumulates experiences, he/she interprets and re-interprets their experiences, and thus, the meaning of their experiences changes as their identity changes over time. In this way, chronological characteristics of narrative knowledge track individual changes over time during his/her trajectory. By looking at the chronological changes of individuals and their meaning making, the narrative tells the story of how the individual develops over time (Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Benson, 2011). This means that when narratives are analysed, they are not conveniently divided into small pieces of stories by cutting off their contexts. Rather, the researcher should pay detailed attention to the multiple layers of contexts that stories are situated within.

4-1-3-5 Flexibility and freedom

Because of these complexities and multiplicities that narratives can carry, contemporary narrative inquiries offer researchers 'a great deal of freedom in the topics and interests they pursue and the methods and approaches they use' (Chase, 2011). The narrative inquiry is therefore, increasingly being accepted as a valuable source of knowledge in various disciplines including psychology, history, medicine, musicology, cognitive science, immunology, pedagogy, political science, disaster management, anthropology, law, gender studies, sociology, neuroscience, teacher education and media research. Within this broadly defined narrative framework, the design of the narrative inquiry varies substantially according to researchers' interests, approaches, analyses and uses of other inquiry methods along with the narrative. This is why complexity and multiplicity is persistent in the narrative inquiry and why the definition of and approaches to the narrative differ substantially between researchers. This indicates that the narrative is 'still a field in the making' (Chase, 2011). In this sense, the narrative approach enables me to pursue my interest of this study, which is situated in the borders of several disciplines, such as applied linguistics, business study and sociolinguistics.

4-2 Application of the narrative research

In the following section, I select several disciplines which are somehow related to this study, and briefly discuss how the narrative inquiry has contributed and the key roles it has played in these disciplines. As I do so, I bring forward insights that have influenced the design of the methodology in this research.

4-2-1 Medical and nursing

The power of the narrative approach in its ability to see the world from an individual's own perspective is especially valued in the field of medical, nursing and social care, where it has been widely introduced as a means to rediscover human aspects to highly technical modern medical treatments (Adachi, 2013). It also serves as a theory and practice to introduce more inclusive nursing methods by empowering patients as individuals (Rappaport, 1995), and as an approach to find a fundamentally difficult balance between objective physician recommendations and subjective patient autonomy (Quill & Brody, 1996). Okubo (2009) uses the phrase 'paradigm shift' to summarise the huge impact of rediscovering the human touch which the narrative inquiry has brought to the medical and nursing field. The use of the narrative in this field illustrates how it can empower silenced people, enabling them to voice subjective meanings of their own world with autonomy. Thus, narratives are often used as a means of 'unsilencing the silenced' in minority and feminist studies (Park 2006; Sakurai 2002; Nakanishi & Ueno 2003).

It might not be compelling for readers if I argued that I saw a common ground between 'silenced' patients in medical and nursing research and 'economically powerful' Japanese business people in my study. However, I find that Japanese business people are often marginalised in the study of business communication in English (see Chapter 2) and evaluated based on EFL oriented measurements, without an opportunity to voice their own perspective. It is especially obvious in research papers published in English, because Japanese English users tend to be 'silent' in voicing their perspective in English, let alone being 'eloquent'. For this reason, the narrative inquiry attracted my attention as a methodological framework which would allow participants to voice their perspective and thoughts in Japanese, their own language.

4-2-2 Teacher development

Another distinct area of research where the narrative inquiry is flourishing is in teaching and teacher education. The narrative has prospered as a means to explore 'growth' and 'changes' of the professional people (e.g. Narrative special issues in the International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education in 1995 and Teaching and Teacher Education in 1997; Johnson and Golombek 2002; Clandinin, Pushor, and Orr 2007) and highlight dynamic and human factors of teachers. By studying narratives of their experiences and the trajectory of their professional career, researchers examine teachers' personal and professional development and growth from different angles (e.g. Johnson & Golombek 2002). Clandinin and Connelly, who explore narratives in educational study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), stress that educators' learning experiences are both personal and social, as their experiences are always in social contexts and interconnected. They also stress the importance of looking at the continuity of experiences, since experiences grow out of other experiences, which in turn lead to further experiences. I found their book, which discusses the narrative inquiry as a methodology to deal with experience and story in professional development, insightful for considering how to look into the development and changes of business people in their use of English.

4-2-3 Sociology

The narrative inquiry is extensively used in the field of sociology because 'narrative texts are packed with sociological information' and 'a great deal of [sociologists'] empirical evidence is in narrative form (Franzosi, 1998: 517). The motivation behind using the narrative inquiry also varies significantly among researchers. Franzosi looks at narratives as 'linguistics and sociology interplay at the level of a text' (1998: 518) and stresses the significance of focusing on the 'structural characteristics of narrative(s)'. Chase (2011) highlights different interests by saying that the 'critical character of narrative research' appeals to her because 'narrative research often critiques cultural discourse, institutions, organizations and interactions that produce social inequalities' (2011: 430). I share my interest with her in that she emphasises that the narrative research on the theme of gender, racial and social minorities has changed 'others' beliefs, attitudes, and actions' (2011: 430). Riessman is another researcher who has produced influential research on issues of gender, culture and poverty by using the narrative inquiry (Riessman, 1989; 2000c; 2005). Riessman's book on the 'narrative method' (Riessman, 2008) provides a balanced and comprehensive overview of the narrative inquiry, which has strongly influenced my design of the method in this research. She discusses the pragmatic steps of the narrative methods, and presents how the outcome of the analysis can be influenced by each of the steps taken by the researcher in practice. By discussing strengths and limitations of narrative analyses, she presents the significant potential for the application of the narrative inquiry to human sciences.

4-2-4 Linguistics

The narrative approach is increasingly being used in language education, L1/L2 acquisition, linguistic anthropology, learner/user identity studies and sociolinguistics (Pavlenko, 2002). In the past few decades, linguistics has seen a huge growth in interest in the narrative and the practice of narrative research (e.g. Barkhuizen & Hacker, 2008; Barkhuizen, 2011; Simon-Maeda 2004; Golombek &. Johnson, 2004; Tsui, 2007; Barkhuizen, 2013). As a natural extension of teaching and teacher education, research on language teachers' experiences and their professional development is one of the flourishing themes of narrative research in linguistics (e.g. Johnson and Golombek 2011; Menard-Warwick 2011; Nelson 2011). More recently, in bi- and multilingualism studies in linguistics, narrative research to explore the learner's identity and their development over time has attracted many researchers (e.g. Pavlenko, 2002; 2008; Norton & Early, 2011; Kanno, 2000; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008; De Fina, 2009). De Fina argues that the more recent trend is to view narratives as a dynamic social practice and she uses a 'discourse analysis' to analyse narratives in order to 'afford an understanding of explicit and implicit aspects of the construction of identity by members of a particular community' (2003: 220).

By showcasing varying types of narrative research in applied linguistics, from more traditional thematic analysis to 'cutting-edge' approaches, Barkhuizen (2013) stresses that 'narrative and narrative research is far from agreed upon' among researchers even within the field of linguistics, and said that he too was struggling to make sense of the narrative territory and to define research of narrative methods (2011). Accordingly, with a wide variety of adoptions of the narrative approach to linguistics, narratives have been recognised as a legitimate source of data in the hermeneutic tradition and as being complementary to more traditional empirical approaches (Pavlenko, 2002; 2007; 2008). In summary, the narrative approach has been used to fill in gaps of more traditional approaches and bring new insights into the field of linguistics.

4-2-5 Business communication

Finally, in business communication studies, the narrative has attracted attention as an effective research method in organisation studies (e.g. Boje, 2001; Gabriel, 2000) and in leadership research (e.g. Maclean, Harvey & Chia, 2012; Sparrowe, 2005), to explore the character of the organisation and leaders. Interestingly, the narrative approach has prospered in particular in entrepreneurship research when studying the identity and value of entrepreneurs (Garcia & Welter, 2011; Hjorth & Steyaert, 2005; Johansson, 2004). Beyond the organisation and leadership research, the narrative inquiry has been used as an 'alternative' and 'supplemental' methodology to the more traditional ones (Boje, 2001) in a wide variety of qualitative research in business communication studies (Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2004).

4-3 Aims of using the narrative inquiry

In this section I discuss why I chose narrative approaches to answer the research questions I set in Chapter 1, and how I designed the practical procedure of collecting narratives as research data. I summarise four reasons why I chose the narrative inquiry as my research method.

4-3-1 Shifting power to participants

The first reason for paying attention to and eventually choosing narrative inquiry for my research is because of its distinctive characteristic of shifting the power relationship between researchers and participants, allowing participants' voices to be heard on par with those of the researchers (Pavlenko, 2007; Rappaport, 1995). This methodology turns the object of the inquiry into the subject of narrative stories and grants the subject a place to voice their own perspective. Thus, participants can choose what they consider to be the most significant stories based on their own perception towards their use of English. Because of this, I am able to gain rare insights into language users' motivations, investments, struggles, losses and gains as well as language ideologies that guide their learning trajectories (Pavlenko, 2002). As I aim to conduct 'user centred' research (Chapter 1-2), this characteristic is powerful and fits my intent well.

User centred research means that I ask them to talk about stories which they perceive to be important for the development of their English, as they come along in their train of thought, rather than stories I consider to be important as a researcher. Consequently, I believe that I can see their experiences from their point of view, and not from that of a linguistic researcher. This means that I will try to see their experiences without framing or fragmenting them based on the researcher's traditional categorisation, such as discipline boundaries of ESP, business communication, intercultural communication, functional boundaries of meetings, rapport, negotiations or linguistic boundaries of L1 or L2. Riessman highlights this point in saying that 'we realized that participants were resisting our efforts to fragment their lived experience into thematic (code-able) categories—our attempts to control meaning' (Riessman, 2000a: 2).

4-3-2 Listening to their internal sense making

Secondly, I chose the narrative approach because participants' internal meaning making about their use of English can be heard through narratives. Narratives allow participants to explain their motivation, their feelings, and their perceived outcome of the communication. These types of knowledge are much less accessible through more traditional qualitative approaches which focus on the 'observable outcome' of language use as a final state. This shift of attention could be important for the way language use is examined, as the researcher can look into a richer and more comprehensive interpretation of the complex and multiple ways in which BELF users make sense of their experiences.

Therefore, participants' meaning making or their own interpretation of their experiences need to be respected, rather than interpreted based on linguists' 'objective' theories. For instance, when some participant says that his/her English is 'bad', I have no intention to analyse if his/her

English skills are 'actually bad'. Instead, my focus would be on analysing why he/she feels this way, and the consequences of such a perception.

In relation to this point, another significant contribution of the narrative inquiry to this research is that it enables me to understand the goal of the communication set by users of English, as well as their perception and evaluation about their achievement of their goals. As discussed in Chapter 3-1-3, one significant characteristic of business communication is the goal orientation. Such goals should be examined and discussed when their use of English is being analysed, but there has been little exploration of this regard in BELF research. This may be because only users could make sense of their goals and their achievement of goals. Such knowledge is difficult to access in more etic approaches and remains left as a gap and the narrative research has a value to potentially supplement and fill in this gap.

4-3-4 Chronological characteristics

Thirdly, a key differentiating factor of the narrative inquiry from other qualitative research is that it enables the researcher to explore users' experiences over time as reflective stories, and this characteristic contributes to this research by exploring how users change their use of English over time, or as they accumulate experiences. In other words, I can analyse the learning trajectories of participants and explore how BELF users develop and grow as professionals over time during their business career, in the same way that the narrative inquiry has been effectively used to explore teachers' professional development.

4-3-5 Access to critical moments

Finally, I would like to point out that the narrative inquiry could uniquely contribute to filling in another gap in BELF research by giving researchers an insight into the 'critical moments' in BELF communication. In this study, I am interested in looking at 'critical moments' in participants' reflective stories from two different angles. Firstly, as discussed by Pennycook in his reflective telling on conceptualisation of language teachers' development, 'critical moments' can be defined as 'moments of potential transformation', or 'a point of significance' when we 'seize the chance to do something different' and 'realize that some new understanding is coming about' (Pennycook, 2004). In the case of the present study, I ask participants to reflect upon their use of English in their business career and tell stories of 'memorable' experiences. These are stories of experiences which hold significant meaning for them, and thus, these could be 'critical moments' in their reflection of their trajectory of using English.

Secondly, their stories could include experiences of important and 'critical' moments for their business career, which may include tough, competitive, highly confidential or sensitive communication in their business experience. Because participants can have full control over what detailed information they disclose, they can talk about highly confidential or sensitive experiences without revealing information they feel uncomfortable sharing. This may provide opportunities for the researcher to explore 'critical moment(s)' or 'highly confidential moment(s)' in business communication. This opportunity is especially valuable because gaining access to real discourse has always been a difficult hurdle for business communication studies, and it is especially notable in Japan (Koike et al., 2008). The lack of rich ethnographical studies in this field in Japan indicates that accessing qualitative data is also difficult. Even when access is granted in business communication, their access is usually limited to less sensitive and less confidential communication (Wilkinson & Young, 2004). Critically important communication such as high stake or conflicting business negotiations have not been, to my knowledge, studied with real conversations. Such negotiations could be the most critical communication that business people take part in, and the lack of studies on the subject is in my opinion, a serious gap in business communication research. I hope that, by using the narrative inquiry, I will be able to gain access to such 'critical' business moments through the narratives of such experiences.

With the combination of the four major reasons discussed above, I consider the narrative inquiry to be an effective and powerful methodological framework for my research. In the following section, I discuss how I have developed the research design using the framework of the narrative inquiry. In this process, I first considered two issues in parallel. One was interview design, including the number of participants, the duration and the structure. The second issue was about participants, such as their profiles and the recruiting method. I first discuss the issue of interview design, and followed by the participants in the next section.

4-4 Interview design

4-4-1 Research instrument

Since I started exploring the possibility of using the narrative inquiry, I was considering the face-to-face qualitative interview as the most straightforward and appealing instrument of collecting narratives in my research environment. Business people, my potential participants, are busy, and persuading them to participate in highly time consuming projects, such as reflective journal writing, often used for narrative research, is difficult. Some narrative research uses pre-existing auto-biographic literature, but such documents are extremely limited for my purpose.

Furthermore, face-to-face interviews would give me greater flexibility and intimacy to establish two way conversations with participants and enable me to hear more detailed narratives on their private views about their use of English.

4-4-2 Number of participants and length of each interview

Narratives 'preserve the complexity of human action' (Polkinghorne, 1995) and cannot be separated from the their unique contexts from which they emerged (Johnson & Golombek, 2002). Therefore, the narrative inquiry typically deals with a relatively small number of individuals, often as small as less than five participants. In this way, researchers are able to closely explore individuals' meaning making of their experiences, personalities and unique contexts, with in-depth analyses and discussions. However, as discussed in Chapter 3 (3-2-3), one of the gaps of the existing business communication research that I have encountered is the lack of exploration of 'differences' of business people in their use of English. This gap is especially salient among qualitative research about Japanese business communication in English because most of such research focuses on a single company or a single occasion. Consequently, such qualitative research is unable to explore differences of individual Japanese BELF users, and may lead readers overgeneralising 'Japanese business English users'. To fill in this gap, I wanted to listen to narratives of an ample number of business people.

After reading a variety of narrative orientated studies, it became clear to me that narrative research which deals with a larger number of participants does exist, but there is a trade-off between the depth and concentration into each individual and the number of participants. On one end, some narrative research focuses on the life histories of one to a few individuals, with personalised, intimate and deep involvement into each individual. Such narrative research typically requires a high level of commitment from the participants and the researchers conduct several, lengthy and extensive life history interviews. Some examples are Phillion's study (2008) of multi-cultural educational policy focusing on one Filipino student, and He's study (He, 2002) of identity development which focuses on three Chinese teachers' life stories. On the other end, some narrative research covers a dozen or more individuals. Such research typically collects narrative stories from a larger number of participants using semi-structured or unstructured interviews around specific themes, and each individual interview is significantly shorter. In this group of research, Riessman's series of studies about women in India (Riessman, 2000b; 2000c) and her reflective explanation on the project from the narrative inquiry point of view (Riessman, 1995; 2000a; 2005; 2008) strongly influenced this project. Riessman is a leading narrative researcher in the field of sociology. Her detailed reflection on how she conducted interviews with 31 Indian women, analysed the narrative data and problematised ethical issues on her project not only provided a guideline for this project, but also reminded me of the methodological issues arising from adopting the narrative inquiry as discussed in detail later. Eventually I decided to invite around 30 business people for individual interviews and narrow down the focus of the research during the analysis stage.

Another essential element I had to consider at the initial stage was ensuring that my idea of personal interviewing to collect narratives was feasible. I had had casual discussions with several business people to understand their attitudes towards participating in academic research. Although they were interested in helping to a certain extent, they tended to have two common concerns in their participating in interviews, namely the length of time required and the confidentiality of their business information. In this section, I discuss how I dealt with their concern over the length of interviews, and confidentiality issues will be discussed later in Chapter 4-4.

It is not easy to persuade business people to spare their 'expensive management time' (Macdonald & Hellgren, 2004: 267) or 'precious private/free time' in order to participate in academic research. Because the narrative inquiry tends to use longer or multiple interviews, I needed to clarify this issue. After consideration, I decided that an hour long interview would be optimal in this context. After about an hour, tiredness can begin to creep in according to Richards (2003: 66), although he thinks an interview could be extended to an hour and a half where necessary. Nakahara, a researcher in management learning who regularly conducts interviews with Japanese business people, also suggests that one hour would be the maximum length of time that busy business people would be willing to spare for an interview[5]. This is later re-confirmed during the pilot interview as participants advised me that interviews in excess of 90 minutes would be too long.

4-4-3 Structure of interviews

Interviews for the narrative inquiry need to transform the relationship of the interviewee and the interviewer into one of a storyteller and a listener, handing over the control to participants (Riessman, 1995). The researcher should invite interviewees to tell their specific stories by encouraging them to explore memories and deeper understandings of their experiences (Chase 2011: 424).

[5] In his blog titled 'Nakahara-Lab Net: Scientific investigations into life-long learning by adults' at http://www.nakahara-lab.net/blog/2012/07/post_1861.html, retrieved on 28th April, 2013

The one hour interview was designed to pursue two conflicting aims: on the one hand I wanted to let participants have maximum autonomy and freedom to develop their narratives according to their own judgement on what aspects and experiences are important for their career as a BELF user (Richards 2003: 51). On the other hand, I wanted to cover as many themes of my interest as possible with all of the participants so that I could have reasonable and valid discussions that I could refer to for all participants during the data analysis stage. Essentially, giving autonomy to participants and covering themes of my interest presented a trade-off, so I conducted pilot interviews to find the optimal balance of the two.

4-4-4 Pilot interviews

During the winter of 2012, I conducted 4 pilot interviews to test my idea of two different approaches for the interview structure. The first interview was with a friend who works in London, during which I tested a loosely defined and flexible structure, trying to invite him to tell stories about all of the themes I listed. The interview lasted for almost two hours. The participant told a number of interesting narratives, but his feedback was that he did not feel that he could talk according to his priorities, and that the interview was too long. Then, I invited another business person for another pilot interview to test the concept of a non-directive interview. More specifically, I explained the aim of my interview at the beginning, and asked him to talk about what he felt was memorable or important in his use of English during his career. He was eloquent and enthusiastic when expressing his opinion, talking about both generalised ideas and highly detailed experiences. However, it was difficult for me to follow his narratives, because I could not obtain basic information about his background at the opening and his talk jumped over time, or went back and forth on the timeline.

Consequently, I decided to ask participants about their experience of using English when they were a student as an opening question, and let participants develop their story from that time point, when they started their careers after graduation. The opening question needs to be meaningful and informative, and make participants feel relaxed (Wilkinson & Young, 2004). I found that the question about their time at school was ideal, since it was easy to discuss and did not address confidential topics. Moreover, it provided me with an opportunity to understand the background and upbringing of participants. It also served as an ice-breaker between unknown the interviewee and interviewer to talk about the rather 'harmless and nostalgic' old-days, allowing a relationship to be built, while the interviewee would feel comfortable speaking frankly in a conversational tone so that there would be no need for the interviewees to be secretive and defensive. As discussed in Chapter 4-4-2, confidentiality could be a concern for participants, and it would make participants feel more comfortable to have such a conversation at the beginning of interviews. Furthermore, I found this would allow a natural progression of the interview as interviewees could talk about their careers chronologically and this was easier for the interviewer to follow.

4-4-5 Procedures before and after interviews

In addition to the interview flow discussed above, procedures for before and after each interview were practically set. Before an interview, I introduced myself briefly in a polite manner. This was an opportunity for me to '[g]auge the participants and the atmosphere of the interview' (Wilkinson & Young, 2004: 213). Then, I asked participants to sign the consent form which explained the matter of confidentiality and their right to cancel participation, consistent with the university's ethical guideline, and to explicitly give me their permission to audio-record the interview for analysis. After the interview, I sent a thank you e-mail on the same day. Additionally a reflection memo was written immediately after each interview to record the impression of the participant, covering both my reflection on the interview and any ideas I had during the interview. These memos were later used to reflect upon how interviews were conducted during the analysis stage.

4-4-6 Role of the researcher

As discussed, interviews are co-constructive social activities, and I felt that developing personal relationships would be particularly important. Thus, my role was not restricted to providing only 'minimal responses' (Richards 2003) but extended to facilitating participants' reflections on their experiences and contractions of their narratives, by asking for clarification of details, as well as by inviting their richer explorations. Researchers' questions could become 'stimuli that elicit responses that would not otherwise have occurred' (Wilkinson & Young, 2004: 217). In this way, I may be able to access knowledge which may not have pre-existed and is co-constructed through the interactions taking place in the interview (Wilkinson & Young, 2004: 217).

In practice, when participants state opinions or make generalisations, I need to ask why they had such opinions, asking them about particular experiences which underlie their opinions (Nakahara, 2010; 2012). I also tried to ask about their emotions, reasoning and motivations where possible. Such stories attached to their experiences are the expressions of their complex sociocultural meanings (Blommaert & Dong, 2010).

The relationship between the participant and the researcher is also important when asking participants about their experiences of personally sensitive issues, such as negative experiences which they may feel rather embarrassed to talk about openly, and sensitive business information, such as the nature of their business, the competitive background and the monetary value involved.

To critically review these points, I listened to the audio recordings of pilot interviews, and examined how I co-constructed narratives during the interviews. I questioned whether participants could have told stories differently if I asked different questions, or provided different cues or responses during the interview (Sakurai 2002: 55). From this reflection, I developed a set of strategies which may improve the quality of my interviews. In general, I found that my experience of having worked for a Japanese trading company and several MNCs was helpful in developing a feeling of 'empathy'. I tried not to express my own values, but such knowledge helped me to imagine the situation and find what issues cropped up when I listened to their narratives. I also tried to lower participants' psychological barrier so that they could openly talk about their challenges or 'failures' of their use of English by telling them that I too have faced many challenges in my use of English, both as a business person and researcher.

4-4-7 Autonomy and respect

As discussed before, I took an open interview structure. This meant that I 'let participants talk about what they feel is important', and was mindful and respectful of each individual's value and meaning of their world, rather than pursuing themes I was interested in. I tried not to close down any stories participants wished to purse as only they could know what was important and relevant for them at the time of telling their stories. As a result, the topics covered by the participants varied widely. Consequently, I was not able to cover all of the themes of my interest with all participants (Richards, 2003: 64), but I encountered unique and valuable stories and knowledge which I did not expect to hear during my planning stage.

4-4-8 Language of interview

Interviews were held in Japanese. This is because it is the easiest and least stressful language for Japanese business people to tell their stories in, and I would have had the best chance to share the same cultural and social background with them and to co-construct narratives. On the other hand, using Japanese would make the data analysis less transparent in a research which is written in English, as the interview data was transcribed in Japanese, and only a part of the transcription is translated into English. As Pennycook says, translation always has political aspects (2001). Hence I need to take extra caution to ensure that I am translating the data in a way which accurately captures what the participants are trying to convey. Another shortcoming of using

Japanese is that I would not have an opportunity to actually listen to or experience their use of English. This issue is further discussed as a limitation of the research later in this chapter.

4-5 Participants

4-5-1 Sampling strategy

In qualitative research, the sample selection has a profound effect on the ultimate quality of the research (Coyne, 1997), hence sampling in this research is particularly important for two major reasons. Firstly, BELF users, in terms of their linguistic characteristics and business contexts, vary extensively, and thus experiences of their use of English at work could differ significantly. Secondly, the number of samples is relatively small. Therefore, it is vital to recruit suitable participants who fit my research questions and describe the process of sampling in sufficient detail to achieve transparency. Yamada (2007: 25) emphasises the dangers of the unconscious use of random sampling in qualitative research without even specifying the population. Random sampling is widely used for quantitative research, but is rarely effective for qualitative research and rather decreases the validity. Patton (2001) explain this point by dividing the sampling strategies into two major categories; probabilistic, which is typically variable in quantitative research but often not so in qualitative research, and non-probabilistic, which is more suitable for qualitative research. The latter strategy aims not to make the samples represent the population, but rather to select samples which can make 'information rich cases' for in depth study. Information rich cases, he notes, are those from which researchers can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, and thus this sampling strategy is also called purposeful sampling.

In order to recruit participants who may be able to tell narratives that include rich experiences that are relevant for the study, the following conditions were developed:

1. Identifies themselves as a non-native English speaker, and uses English frequently with non-native English speakers, though not necessarily exclusively
2. Uses English for his/her occupational needs which are associated with activities of the organisations to which the person belongs
3. Born in a family of Japanese speaking parents, and has been educated up to a minimum of higher education level within the Japanese education system
4. Has a career spanning at least 10 years in business
5. Classifies themselves as using English 'rather often', in their career, and feels that English has some impact on their career path

Conditions 1 and 2 are confirmations of the description of BELF users. Condition 3 aims to recruit people with a 'typical' Japanese background to explore how they shift from a monolinguistic Japanese background to the global business context. The category of 'higher education' in Japan covers universities, junior colleges and vocational schools, and is applicable to over 50% of Japanese population since the 1980s. Condition 4 is to ensure that participants would have had enough experience and a considerable timeline to explore their changes of English use in their business career. Condition 5 is based on an expectation that those who 'often' use English can tell stories with richer information of their own experiences, compared to those who use English less frequently.

However, I did not have specific requirements in terms of:

1. Age: However, participants are likely to be over the age of 30 if they have had over 10 years of business experience
2. Gender: Although the gender ratio is not expected to be equal in the Japanese business context, I did not intentionally discriminate on gender
3. Industry and occupation: Consideration was made to recruit people from a variety of business contexts rather than focusing on any particular industry or occupations. The participants also include professionals who work for non-profit or public sector organisations

Linguistic competence in English also varies widely among individuals, as discussed in Chapter 2-1, and may influence the nature of the experiences of individuals' use of English. However, there is no reasonable indicator of such competence, and thus, I did not set any preference for English competence.

4-5-2 Recruiting

From the initial stage, I wanted to contact participants individually through my personal network, rather than through organisations, for two reasons. Firstly, autobiographic narratives are private stories, and contacting through the official route via organisations would lead to negative impacts on the privacy and freedom of storytellers (detailed discussion of accessing individuals for interview is found in Marschan-Piekkari, Welch, Penttinen, & Tahvanainen, 2004). Secondly, I wanted to listen to narratives of business people of both genders with different backgrounds, career profiles, and professions who work in a range of organisational environments.

In order to recruit participants, I sent an email to about 20 acquaintances who themselves are business people to inform the aim and background of the research, and ask them to introduce prospective participants from their colleagues or friends. The acquaintances are mainly professionals who have used English in various fields of business, who I know through my former business career in Japan, and social and educational activities in Japan and in the UK. These acquaintances work in different companies from different industries within different professional fields.

4-6 Data collection

In March 2012, I went to Japan to conduct interviews. These were held in Tokyo and three other major cities (they are among the top ten largest cities in Japan). Before I visited Japan, I had e-mail communication with several acquaintances, and eventually I conducted 24 interviews in those four cities. A few scheduled interviews were cancelled at the last minute due to changes in participants' schedules, but a few additional interviews were arranged through the introduction of further participants.

Before the interview, in most of the cases, I sent an e-mail to introduce myself and the objective of the research, and to inform the conditions of the interviews, such as length, topic, and anonymity. In other cases, I did not contact the participant until we met, but the person who introduced me to the participant had informed participant of the interview and given similar information. Participants were debriefed of the topic only roughly, as being 'how they have used English in their business, and how they have felt about the use of English at work'.

I did not intentionally control the gender of the participants, which left me with 7 female participants and 27 male participants. The low number of female participants does not significantly contrast to statistics of managers in Japanese companies[6]. All interviews were arranged in a quiet place decided by participants at their convenience, which resulted in about half of the interviews being conducted at their office, while the rest were in public places.

From August to December in 2013, I conducted an additional ten interviews in London with those who have extensive experiences of using English with non-native speakers of English. Four participants had previously worked in non-English speaking countries. I decided to conduct these additional interviews after I was introduced to these participants in London, and I found their experience could bring valuable information to my research. The interview procedure was similar to the arrangements for the interviews conducted in Japan.

6. Ratio of women to men in the management position in the Japanese companies is 6.6% in 2013, according to the Nikkei Shinbun article at http://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXLASDF19H10_Z10C14A8EE800, acceded on 29th August, 2014.

Table 1: List of Participants (in order of appearance)

Pseudonyms	First appears in	Gender	Age	Industry
Honda	Excerpt 1	M	50s	Trading
Erika	Excerpt 3	F	30s	Manufacturing
Mori	Excerpt 5	M	50s	Technology/Research
Takeda	6-3-1	M	60s	Technology
Itoh	Excerpt 6	M	50s	Trading
Wakaya	Excerpt 7	M	50s	Technology
Kitami	Excerpt 9	M	60s	Trading
Bando	Excerpt 11	M	50s	Consulting
Hanna	6-3-5	F	40s	IT
Naomi	6-3-5	F	30s	Aviation
Momo	Excerpt 12	F	50s	Hospitality
Daiwa	6-3-7	M	50s	Trading
Kaga	Excerpt 14	M	40s	Engineering
Ryoko	Excerpt 15	F	50s	Consumer
Fumie	Excerpt 16	F	50s	Consumer
Yoshimi	Excerpt 17	M	50s	Public Sector
Nishii	Excerpt 19	M	50s	Technology
Chika	Excerpt 22	F	40s	Public Sector
Adachi	Excerpt 32	M	50s	Research
Gotoh	Excerpt 36	M	30s	Technology
Jinbou	7-3-2	M	50s	Banking
Suzuki	8-2-3-5	M	50s	Banking
Okada	8-3-5	M	50s	Service

The pseudonyms are based on Japanese family names for male participants and first names for female participants because I actually used family names for all of the male participants, and first names for most of the female participants.

The interviews were conducted following the interview flow discussed in Chapter 4-4-3. The actual length of interviews varied depending on the responses of participants, but all interviews lasted between 60 to 90 minutes including the initial conversation and final greetings.

4-7 Methodological issues

In this part, methodological issues as a result of using narrative analysis are discussed. Although I discussed ethics, limitations and rigour separately, all three are closely related to the characteristics of the narrative inquiry.

4-7-1 Ethics

Over the course of the project, the ethical issues reappear in different ways. Researchers using the narrative inquiry have made extensive and detailed discussions on specific ethical issues (Bell, 2011; Clandinin, Murphy, Huber & Orr, 2009; Clandinin et al., 2007; Riessman, 2005), and here, I discuss three which I needed to consider again and again in my research.

Firstly, I found that protecting the anonymity of participants is not straightforward in the narrative inquiry because, unlike other qualitative researches in general which quote relatively short excerpts from interviews, narrative inquiries often produce longer stories from individuals' narratives with their context which increase the risk that narrators will feel vulnerable or exposed (Chase, 2003). Bell (2011) notes that she had to face the ethical dilemma between discussing the participant's life story in sufficient detail to justify her analysis and protecting the anonymity of participants. She stresses that when researchers struggle between responsibility for participants and responsibility for academia, the obligation to the participants always overrides the researcher's own agenda. Nevertheless, this tension is especially acute in narrative research. Over the process of transcribing the interview data, I realised that business careers are 'highly unique' to each individual. Because of the uniqueness of their experiences, I decided that disclosing the entire story of individual interviews and transcripts of the original Japanese might be against the interest of storytellers because of the potential risk of disclosing their identity, and as such full interview outline and transcripts in original Japanese are not provided. The outline of their story may be unique enough to construct the identity of a storyteller, even if all of the proper nouns in the story are changed to pseudonyms. Furthermore, some of the Japanese participants told their narratives with a distinctive dialect and using particular style in Japanese, and this may pinpoint the regions and companies to which they belong. If I were to disclose entire interviews or original transcripts, I need to alter significant parts of their story, such as the nature of their work, position, location, industry as well as their distinctive use of language in Japanese in order to protect their anonymity completely. Therefore, I decided not to disclose the story of whole interviews and the original Japanese transcript, although such information would help to increase the credibility of the research.

Another ethical concern is the researcher's power to retell the narrative of participants (Barkhuizen, 2011; Bell, 2011). Although participants may be heard by researchers, the analysis and writing by researchers carry the danger of overriding participants' voices. Researchers may not understand the story in the way that participants want them to be heard, yet they may think that they fully comprehend the stories, and start imposing their interpretation that reflect their assumptions (Bell, 2011). Cadman and Brown (2011) raise a strong concern that researchers' voices override participants' voices by using only tiny fragments of much longer and more complex stories told by participants and by retelling them. They conclude that this 'inescapable paradox' exists at the heart of every narrative inquiry. Reporting and writing of narrative knowledge in the narrative inquiry is a major challenge for narrative researchers (Barkhuizen, 2011).

The third issue, which bears some similarities to the two aforementioned issues, is the matter of 'consent'. That is, the extent to which participants gave me consent to include information and insights which were not told explicitly. Criticising the uncritical use of narratives in the narrative inquiry, Pavlenko argues for the importance of analysing 'why certain things are said in certain ways at particular times and others are excluded' (Pavlenko, 2008: 321). Being aware of the importance of understanding the 'narrative environment' of the stories (Chase, 2011: 425), I did an internet search about the participants, their organisations or their industries, both before and after each interview, which led to discoveries of missing or untold parts of participants' stories which might have influenced how stories were told. On a few occasions, I also read about 'setbacks' in the participant's career through the internet survey, and I felt that this 'untold part of one's career' may have significantly influenced how and why some stories were told by participants in certain ways. The information I learned outside of interviews made me 'read' the participant's story from a different angle, but I questioned if I could include this information in my analysis. The participants consented to provide their knowledge to my research, but does their consent include my use of 'untold information' and combining them with their stories? Once I had this question in my mind, I became more aware of the ethical issues in my research. Furthermore, listening to narratives told by participants, I always had insights that each participant had some sort of 'self-image' which they wanted to present to me which influenced how narratives were told. Initially, I did not feel a salient dilemma in my research to discuss these 'self-image'. However, as I thought more deeply and my analysis became more critical, I started wondering if participants had given me consent to discuss this self-image, their profound identity. I felt that discussing an individual's identity critically would 'infringe' communication norms in the Japanese business context. Looking back at the interviews, they definitely consented to me discussing their experiences of using English, including their 'face-losing' ones. However, I don't believe they expected me to 'disclose' their identity as business people.

Eventually, after numerous drafts, I decided to focus my discussion on themes directly related to the 'use of English' and be cautious to extend my discussion to 'untold' parts of stories, in order to not break the trust that participants had placed in me. Nonetheless, I did analyse these 'untold' aspects and some of the insights are implicitly included in my writing. I am aware that this restriction limited my discussion, but I hope the findings in this project are still valuable for readers.

4-7-2 Consideration to a methodological limitation

'A first person narrative reports past event(s) that undoubtedly happened, but all we have is the reflection' (Riessman, 2008: 188). This characteristic of the narrative inquiry leads to an issue specifically relevant to this study, that is, the lack of presentation of their 'actual' or 'real' English discourse they produced during their experiences. Since I conducted pilot interviews and listened to stories about their own use of English, I naturally felt an inquisitive desire to observe their use of English in their business contexts. I anticipate that this may be a frustration for readers and I would like to explain why I decided not to include such data collection in my research design. For both the researcher and the reader, as linguists, it is only natural to have an interest in knowing their actual use of English. Therefore, it might be a logical step to analyse this as part of the study. I even considered asking participants to speak in English during the interviews. However, I concluded that this request might cause major disruptions to the research design, especially because the core motivation of using the narrative approach is to let participants have autonomy when telling their own stories. Asking participants to speak in English with me may cause an 'uneasiness' or 'drag them out of their comfort zone', and I therefore accept this limitation, considering the trade-off between the unique value of the narrative approach and its limitation.

4-7-3 Rigour

In quantitative approaches, the reliability (test-retest reliability) and validity (both internal and external validity) of scientific research are considered necessary, so qualitative approaches face significant criticism for lacking such reliability and validity. In narrative inquiries, stories are considered as a construction of the interviewer and interviewee, meaning that a different researcher could produce a different story. The transcription, analysis and interpretation could also be different if someone else conducted the research. Thus traditional reliability and validity used in the quantitative approach is not suitable for the narrative inquiry (Sakurai, 2002: 39). When applied to narrative projects, two levels of validity needs to be evaluated: validity of the story told by a research participant and the validity of the analysis which Riessman calls 'the story told by the researcher' (2008: 184). The alternative criteria for reliability and validity for the narrative inquiry has been proposed differently by researchers (Barkhuizen, 2011; Bell, 2011; Polkinghorne, 2007; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008) and there is no single right answer. Consequently, I realise that there is no readily available guideline for the validity of my research. Nevertheless, I have tried to achieve three alternative criteria of 'transparency', 'coherence', and 'persuasiveness' of the situated truth. Sakurai emphasises the importance of research transparency, which is realised by detailed and clear descriptions of research processes such as sampling, interview design, transcription and analysis methods (Sakurai, 2002). In this way, readers can critically evaluate interpretive accounts of findings and presented stories (Riessman, 2008: 188). This study attempts to be coherent by 'link[ing] pieces of data and [by] render[ing] them meaningful and coherent theoretically' (Riessman, 2008: 191). Persuasiveness is strengthened when theoretical claims are supported with evidence from informants' accounts, and negative cases and alternative interpretations are both included and considered (Riessman, 2008: 191). With transparency, coherence and persuasiveness, I hope the argument in this paper establishes trustworthiness, and the situated truth within the context of this research.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explained the characteristics of the narrative inquiry, the reasons why I select the narrative inquiry for this project, and how this methodological framework has been applied in the research, ending with a discussion on some remaining methodological issues. Qualitative research is endlessly creative and interpretive (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) and Denzin and Lincoln use the analogy of 'bricoleur' (DIY carpenter) and 'quilt makers' to explain the tasks of researchers in this field. Researchers need to utilise whatever strategies, methods or empirical material they have at hand (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) to construct the best possible qualitative interpretation, in order to explore the data they have to answer the research questions. It is certainly true in my research, and I do not apply a 'standard', 'established' or 'readily made' approach in the narrative inquiry. Over the course of the project, I have experimented and stretched several different methodological approaches of the 'narrative inquiry', proposed by different researchers from different disciplines, and I reached this method. The process was similar to quilt making; using creativity and inspiration (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), I tried to construct the best methodological tools that capture the realities of BELF users.

Chapter 5: Data and analysis

Introduction

In this chapter, the analytical procedure of this project is discussed. Initially, four different types of analytical approaches of the narrative inquiry are reviewed, followed by a discussion of thematic analysis as a primary analytical reference of this project, including some of its criticisms. Afterwards, I present a more detailed process of the analysis, including transcription of the audio-recorded interviews to written texts, division of the texts to 'units' for analysis, and coding, critical reading and translation of each unit.

5-1 Narrative analysis

As I have discussed in Chapter 4, the conceptualisation and interpretation of the narrative inquiry varies widely among researchers from different disciplines, and thus the discussion of the analytical frameworks of the narrative inquiry also varies widely among researchers (Boje, 2001; Clandinin, 2007; Riessman, 2008; Czarniawska, 2004; Trahar, 2006), reflecting the differences in their aims and conceptualisation of the narrative inquiry. Riessman's typology of the four different types of narrative analysis, namely, thematic analysis, structural analysis, dialogic/performance analysis and visual analysis, may be one of the most extensive and flexible discussions of the analytical procedures of the narrative inquiry (2008). She explains that thematic analysis focuses on 'what' is told in the stories, structural analysis on 'how' the stories are told, dialogic/performance analysis asks 'who an utterance may be directed to, when, and why, that is' and 'for what purposes' (2008: 105) and visual analysis focuses on the 'visual representation of experience' (2008: 142). She argues that these four typologies are not mutually exclusive and their boundaries are fuzzy (2008: 18). This emphasises the importance for researchers to 'innovate and transgress' beyond the boundaries of the typology of the approaches, by 'interrogating' [their] own projects' (2008: 18).

5-1-1 Thematic analysis

From the initial stage, it was clear to me that my primary interest in the participants' stories were 'what' was told by participants, the significant events and their meaning making presented in the stories of their experience. Therefore, thematic analysis is the most relevant analytical method. According to Riessman, thematic analysis is 'probably the most common' in narrative analysis, and in this approach the 'content is the exclusive focus' (2008: 53). However, placing an exclusive focus on the 'content' in the narrative inquiry has been criticised by other researchers, especially in the field of humanities. For instance, Pavlenko, who has been applying the narrative inquiry to her study of bi-/multilingual language users emphasises the need to pay critical attention to co-construct the nature of narratives. She stresses that narratives are 'powerfully shaped by social, cultural, and historical conventions as well as by the relationship between the storyteller and the interlocutor' (Pavlenko, 2002: 214). Therefore, even a researcher who employs thematic analysis should not place 'uncritical reliance on what is said in the narratives' and needs to be sensitive to 'linguistic, interactional, and discursive properties of narratives' (Pavlenko, 2008). Polkinghorne and Misher are also critical of thematic analysis as they believe that it fails to fully exploit the potential power of the narrative inquiry (in a transcripted conversation in Clandinin & Murphy, 2007). Yet Misher says it 'doesn't mean I think people shouldn't be doing it'. He continues to say that he thinks of the narrative as a 'problem-centred area of inquiry', and that 'people address the kinds of problems they're interested in and find that one or another form of narrative methodology is useful for doing it' (Clandinin & Murphy, 2007: 635). Referring to this conversation between Polkinghorne and Misher, Clandinin says that she was 'struck by the tensions [she] saw between different ways of understanding narrative inquiry within the larger field of qualitative methodologies' (2007: 635).

I apply the thematic analysis because it is the most useful analytical approach to answer the questions I stated in Chapter 1-5, as it is effective for investigating 'what' participants say about their experiences of using English. During the analysis, I also paid attention to ensure that I am 'sensitive' to the 'linguistic, interactional, and discursive properties of narratives' as suggested by Pavlenko. Nevertheless, I realised that this 'sensitivity' cannot be fully expressed in writing due to the conflicting ethical concerns I discussed in Chapter 4-7-1 and the limited space for this thesis.

5-2 The Analytical process

In this part, I discuss the process undertaken in the analysis of this research in detail, referring to Riessman's analytical steps of 'thematic analysis' (Riessman, 2008: 53-76). Her analytical steps are used as a principal reference because her discussion is not focused too narrowly on a particular discipline, and is both comprehensive and flexible. In her discussion, a variety of examples are quoted from different disciplines. Her pragmatic and detailed step by step discussion based on examples backed by her experience as a leading narrative researcher makes her discussion practical while still allowing for room for researchers to explore the unique interests and aims of their own research.

5-2-1 Transcription

The compilation of the 34 interviews amounts to around 35 hours of audio data. Each interview lasted around an hour, and the recordings have been transcribed into Japanese, with the end result being around 10 to 15 pages of single space written field data per participant. Riessman (2008: 28) argues that there is no single universal form of data transcription, by presenting a few different transcription examples from her own research to show how each of her examples suit different analytical interests. In this research, the written transcribed texts in Japanese apply the following two rules: 1) utterances of both the participant and the researcher are included to analyse the co-constructive nature of the interview, and 2) the texts are transcribed in a matter which resembles the audio data as closely as possible without editing. The written data remains in Japanese during the analysis process because translations into another language inevitably requires a degree of interpretation (Riessman, 2008). This means that beyond the initial analysis, both the coding and the idea generation in this study have been done in Japanese. By using the original expressions in the Japanese language during the entire analytical process, I aimed to minimise the 'noise' and potential loss of detail during the translation from Japanese to English.

5-2-2 Dividing and coding

My primary intention in the process of dividing and coding the transcribed texts is to follow Riessman's principal that in narrative analysis, participants' accounts of experiences are interpreted 'as a whole' (2008: 57). In other words, the contexts in which participants' stories are situated are preserved in the analytical process. Therefore, unlike the analytical process in the Grounded Theory, participants' accounts of experiences are not fractured into thematic pieces. In the first phase, I studied interviews of each participant's biographical story of their use of English 'as a whole'. At this stage, I had three aims in reading the transcribed data: 1) to understand the overall storyline of each participant so that I could determine how to divide each 'unit' of their experience in their biographical story; 2) to add tentative and rough 'tags' which represent key words and themes that I attached to parts of written texts, and 3) to write down initial impressions or ideas as a short memo from the reading of each participant's trajectory.

When biographical stories were segmented into 'units' (2008: 93) of experiences, I decided that each 'unit' should cover the extended story of one event as presented by the participant themselves. All the pages of the transcription were printed out onto paper and the text was broken up into 'units' with the name of the participant, initial tags and comments. Afterwards, I read each 'unit' carefully paying particular attention to themes such as 'what they did', 'how or why they did it' and most importantly, 'how they make sense of' the experience.

The interpretation of the participants' internal sense making includes their retrospective judgments about the causes, outcomes and effects of the experiences. At the end, each 'unit' of experience was assigned codes to describe the four elements which are important in my research. Two of the elements are factual characters of events, namely 1) the 'scenery or genre' of the experience (e.g. meeting, writing, negotiation) and 2) the 'interlocutors' (e.g. Indians, Mexicans, native speakers of English, boss, clients etc.). The other two elements are concerned with the participant's internal sense making, namely 3) the 'theme' (e.g. power, multilingualism, content of talk etc.), and 4) the 'emotions and reflections' experienced (e.g. anxiety, failure, turning point etc.). All of these 'units' of experiences were given identifiable numbers and attributes and these codes were all recorded on the spreadsheet.

After this process was completed for all 'units' of experiences, the coding was examined across 'units' of experiences. The 'units' with the same and similar codes were compared across participants so that I could identify reoccurring patterns, and examine variations across participants. At this stage, I specifically separated experiences during the participants' initial stage of English use from those in the latter stages. This was because many participants talked about the transition as a significant experience in their trajectory, which made me realise that experiences in the initial stage had unique characteristics, distinguishing them from those in the latter stages. The theme of 'initial stage experiences' became the discussion of Chapter 6. Then, the rest of experiences were examined based on the codes. The cross examination and detailed reading in this phase forced me to pay attention to why some experiences were perceived to be more difficult or challenging by participants, while others were perceived to be easier or less challenging. As a result, three main themes were emerged and these are discussed in Chapter 7. Those themes are 'what' is perceived to be difficult among the participants, 'why' the participants perceive the particular experience to be easy or difficult, and how the participants deal with the co-use of English and Japanese in their business contexts.

In the final phase, the focus was placed on the 'changes' over the trajectory, by reading the participants' experiences in the same order that they had spoken during the interviews. I paid attention to any links that the storyteller made between one experience being discussed and another experience that took place before or after. This was critical since a single experience can be interpreted differently when it is situated in a series of experiences in a storyteller's life (Riessman, 2008: 20). During this phase, I re-examined how participants make sense of their experience during the initial stage of their professional career, and these insights in this analysis were added to Chapter 6. Additionally, the entire trajectories of individuals were closely examined as a string of experiences. I tried to understand 'the implicit macro story' (Boje, 2001) which the storytellers incorporate in their explanations at the time of the interview. This analysis is discussed further in Chapter 8, with the three main themes of changes over time, learning with use, and the trajectory of Japanese BELF users.

5-2-3 Translation

After this stage, the rough idea of the discussion flow was sketched in Japanese. Then, translations of the data were made in parallel with writing of the thesis in English. When the Japanese field data was translated into English to be sited in the thesis, there were two phases of interpretation. The first phase was to interpret participants' words in Japanese. This interpretation required the researcher to pay close attention to 'how' stories were told in the Japanese interview context, in order to reflect upon the criticisms I have received for focusing exclusively on the 'what' in the thematic analysis as discussed in Chapter 5-1-1. While each of the Japanese words used by participants was being examined, consideration was placed on what meanings were being conveyed, reflecting upon how words were used by the storyteller, and in what context they were used. The second phase of interpretation required the researcher to find suitable English words that were close equivalents to Japanese. A significant amount of time had to be devoted to this phase, because the English word needed to take into account the tone with which the Japanese word was used. The missing subject and ambiguity of expressions, which are typical in conversational Japanese, make the translation more difficult. Even when such care is taken, the original 'feel' of the story is inevitably lost during the process of the translation (Riessman, 2008). After the translation, the English transcripts were edited slightly to make them more readable.

5-3 Process of writing

5-3-1 Narrowing down participants

Riessman says that narrative methods are 'not appropriate for studies of large numbers of nameless, faceless subjects' (Riessman, 2000a: 23). Indeed, during the course of my writing, I found it challenging when I tried to discuss a range of Japanese business people with different characteristics, while still 'preserving' their face. This is a reflection of the trade-off which I discussed in Chapter 4-4-2. Consequently, having read and analysed the story of the first 34 participants, I narrowed down the number of participants for mainstream discussions in Chapters 7 and 8, so that I could discuss each participant's stories in more depth. I initially excluded participants whose experiences were not closely related to my theme, specifically, those who use English only when communicating with native speakers of English in countries where

English is spoken, or those who did not use English frequently. Furthermore, I excluded those who, instead of telling their own stories or experiences, talked mainly about their generalised points of view. I then excluded those who were in administrative positions because they were often language specialists, therefore, their attitudes towards language varied significantly from those in professional positions. At this stage, I had 17 main participants, which was still too many to quote long conversations from each of them. As a result, in the process of writing, I needed to find a balance between pursuing the individual and thematic perspectives. At one stage in writing, I considered an option of narrowing down the number of participants further and writing trajectories as assorted life stories with integrated thematic issues. However, I felt that this approach did not fully explore and maximise the potential of the narratives I had collected.

As a result, I decided that a theme-based discussion would be more suitable for addressing the research questions, although I am aware that it could make it difficult for readers to imagine the 'individual face' of each participant. Having interviewed each participant face-to-face, I have clear images of their 'individual personality and contexts'. Although I have tried to include such information to give insight into the 'individual personality and contexts' of the participant, I acknowledge that the extent to which I can do this is limited.

5-3-2 Holistic and focused discussion

Another dilemma I faced during the writing phase was finding a balance between providing a holistic view of each participant on his or her experiences and discussing each thematic topic with in-depth analysis. During the analysis of narratives, I faced an 'information overload' (Macdonald & Hellgren, 2004: 266) and found the 'detail(s) messy' (Macdonald & Hellgren, 2004: 272). '(T)he greater the researcher's attempts to exploit the wealth of interview data, the greater the problems that arise' (2004: 264) was an issue that I encountered. Each analytical process led me to create a range of codes, and even after sorting and grouping them, each theme contained specific details with significant potential to be explored further. Each topic deserves a chapter of discussion and the narrative data provides a plethora of details to be explored. However, because the aim of the project is to provide a 'holistic view' of BELF users, I decided to discuss a relatively large number of themes, rather than focusing on a few in particulars. Nevertheless, I still had to give up on including some themes, such as 'cross cultural communication', 'variety of Englishes' and 'keeping face', mainly because not many participants touched upon them.

As such, I had to summarise or cut some of the participants' stories, rather than presenting them as a whole 'unit'. As a compromise, I attempted to describe and explain the context of the stories rather than simply presenting the stories as told by the participants. Even with such efforts, I could only discuss the most significant themes and a large proportion of participants' stories were left unmentioned. I hope the final production of the project presents a holistic view of participants with each of the themes being explored at a theoretically meaningful level of coherence and depth.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the analysis and writing process of the thesis. The reasons for using thematic analysis as a primary analytical framework are discussed, and the issues of this approach are considered. Using the discussions of the methodology and the analytical process in Chapter 4 and 5 as a basis, the following three chapters focus on the outcome of the data analysis.

Chapter 6: Becoming a BELF user

Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 5, the data was collected and analysed based on 'units' of experiences as told by the participants. They were asked to talk about the most significant and memorable challenges they have faced in their trajectory of use of English. Many participants spoke of their first experiences of using English at work, which was coded as part of the 'initial transition' in the first stage of analysis. This 'initial transition' is called the 'school-to-work transition' in management studies and has been widely acknowledged as a critically important period for business people in their career (Nakahara, 2012). Therefore, it is no surprise that many participants state their first time using English at work as both a memorable and critical moment in their trajectories.

6-1 Analysis of the school-to-work transition

In each of the interviews, I started by asking the participants to cast their minds back and reflect upon their use of English when they were still students in the Japanese education system. Participants typically started by talking about key milestones they achieved whilst learning English at school, before proceeding to discuss how they decided on their first job especially if they felt using English was a criteria which was considered in the decision. Afterwards, participants typically spoke of their experiences during the initial stage of their use of English at work. This chapter analyses and discusses the stories of this theme. Among the 34 participants I interviewed, 27 participants told stories about their first use of English at work, or of experiences in the early stages of their career. I categorised their stories into three groups based on how difficult participants found their 'initial use' of English. The groups were 'easy', 'relatively difficult but manageable' and 'not successful'. I read the experiences compiled within each group carefully, and tried to see similarities between participants in the same group, and compared their backgrounds. I then proceeded to coding experiences with two different perspectives; one is coding by the 'causes of difficulties' whilst the other is by 'strategies implemented to overcome difficulties'. These codes were developed based on participants' own sense-making and were not pre-determined by the researcher. The first group, 'causes of difficulties' includes codes such as 'listening', 'listening varieties' and 'vocabulary'. The second group, 'strategies implemented to overcome difficulties' included 'experience', 'being realistic' and 'learning to repair'. The following is the discussion of the detailed analysis based on these two groups of coding. The transcription conventions used in the following excerpts are listed at the beginning of the thesis (p xiv).

6-2 Differences between the participants

Amongst the 27 participants who talked about their initial stage of use of English at work, 5 said that their first use of English went relatively smoothly and that they faced no major difficulties. The other 22 participants said that they faced a significant challenge, although all of them eventually overcame these challenges and difficulties. It is to be noted that a necessary condition for selecting participants was that they had to 'have experience of using English at work', and consequently any participants who had not overcome the challenges they faced in the initial stage were not included among participants. Nevertheless, I will come back to discuss such cases towards the end of this Chapter 6-4. In the following part, I first discuss the 5 participants who said they did not initially face any significant challenges.

6-2-1 Participants with strong interest in English

Participants who perceive their transition of initial stage as 'easy' all had a strong interest in English during their school time. Some of them studied English as their major, whilst many others had significant experiences of using English whilst they were still students. For all five participants, their strong interest in English started from before high school with a memorable experience sparking interest in the subject. Honda was one such participant.

Honda's story

Honda liked English ever since he was at primary school, and wanted to work either in a *Sogo Shosha* (a general term for trading companies in Japan) or become a diplomat. He travelled to America when he was a high school student and later majored in English at university. Through the experience, he became able to use English, although according to a native speaker friend, he spoke 'textbook English', because he learned English mainly from studying textbooks rather than using the language. Realising his dream, he joined a *Shosha*, but was assigned to a domestic role in his first two years. He was then transferred to a position where he was required to regularly produce tender documents in English. After only a week into his new assignment, his senior colleagues went on a sudden business trip, and he was left alone to produce tender documents singlehandedly. All of a sudden, he needed to read over 100 telexes written in English daily, and he had the arduous task of reading many bulky tender documents in preparation for bidding on tenders. He felt that he could survive the complete chaos, thanks to the English skills he acquired as a student. He noted it was of particular use that he was able to read English quickly.

Excerpt 1 - Honda

[H: for Honda]

H: At the time, I was desperate to learn about how I could deal with [the challenge of] English…Within a very short time frame, I physically absorbed these technical terms.

Two months later, he went to Canada with four engineers for two months on a mission to repair products that his company had sold. He explained that these engineers had relatively strong English skills, but that they were not good enough to negotiate in English.

Excerpt 2 - Honda

[H: for Honda and R: for researcher]

R: So, who did the negotiations?

H: I did.

R: It was your first business trip abroad; did you have any problems?

H: Not at all. I'd picked up the vocabulary already when I was working with tender documents. Remember? So, no problems at all…When I was at university, I travelled to England and Israel. I'd gained a fair amount of exposure to English during my time in the two countries.

R: I think the English you use at work is different from the English you use with friends as students… didn't you encounter any challenges in the transition process?

H: In Japan, the textbooks use formal English, while the English I spoke during my travels was a lot more casual…colloquial English is easy to learn once you've mastered formal English. It was simply a case of adjusting my style, based on what my ear picked up.

The background before his initial use of English in a business environment is typical of the five participants. They were all top performers in English in the Japanese schools they attended, and each of the participants had enriched the learning process by going beyond the curriculum. For example, Fumie attended a private English club after school to study with university students when she was still a high school student, whilst Ryoko visited America for a homestay. Meanwhile, Okada had been an active member of an English debating club and Nishii had been an avid reader of English books long before he became friends with his English teacher from

America during his time at university. Each of the five participants said that these practical experiences increased their confidence in using English. Consequently, when the participants entered the job market, they considered their English a particular strength, and as such, sought to attain a job that would make best use of their English skills.

Once they joined their respective companies, they showed their English skills were indeed more practical than those of colleagues, allowing them to rapidly become effective BELF users. As written in the above transcript, Honda was a confident user of English at work only two months into his first assignment. The ease with which he shouldered the responsibility of handling tender documents in English showed that his writing and reading skills were proficient, whilst he also confidently used English in business negotiations when he went to Canada. Since his first assignment, his English skills have only developed further. He considers this a major asset which has opened doors throughout career. This perception of English as an asset or strength was shared by each of the five participants.

6-2-2 Participants who had difficulties

In this part, I turn my discussion to the other 22 participants who considered their initial experience to be 'difficult' or challenging. Unlike the five participants discussed in Chapter 6-2-1, this group of participants felt that they were not particularly ready to use English at work at the start of their business career. Regardless of this, some of these participants took up a job knowing that it would require them to use English regularly. For many participants in this group, their English skills were developed exclusively within the school system.

When I analysed their stories of difficult experiences at work, I found that difficulties are complex, dynamic and wide-ranging. As such there was no simple or obvious mean through which the stories could be categorised according to their sense-making. Individual 'units of experiences' often included both reasons why their initial use of English was so challenging, and how they dealt with the difficulties they faced. As a consequence, I first present the overall review of the 'causes of difficulties' without presenting excerpts of their stories before discussing in detail some 'strategies implemented to overcome difficulties' using examples of participants' stories. When I looked into the 'causes of difficulties', six codes emerged although these were by no means exhaustive. These six codes are 'listening', 'listening varieties', 'speaking', 'mental barrier', 'vocabulary' and the 'problem of school English'.

Listening is reported as being difficult by many participants, but especially by those who did not have experience of using English outside of their school curriculum. Four participants said that listening was difficult because they first used English with business people who spoke unfamiliar varieties of Englishes.

Speaking English was also clearly indicated as a challenge by participants, with many pointing out a 'feeling' of 'anxiety' as a factor which restricted them from speaking out. In foreign language learning, 'anxiety' (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; Scovel, 1978) has long been identified as a major obstacle for foreign language learners, and this 'anxiety' is defined as 'the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry' (Horwitz et al., 1986). Some participants' narratives fit this description. Furthermore, some participants also spoke of the 'uncomfortable feeling of speaking in a way which is different how they want to speak'. It seemed to be the case that many participants had mapped out the ideas they wanted to convey in their speech but felt unable to do so in English in a comfortable manner. This challenge was coded as a 'mental barrier' because of the unwillingness to speak out in front of others in a way they are uncomfortable with.

Some participants attributed the difficulty to unpractical studies they conducted in the Japanese education system they went through when they were students. Such reasons were coded as 'school education'.

Finally, many participants found it difficult to communicate in English because they struggled to cope with the professional vocabulary and specific expressions unique to business. Such challenges were coded as 'vocabulary'.

In the following part, I discuss their experiences in greater detail using excerpts from stories with a focus on how participants overcame the difficulties.

6-3 Dealing with the difficulties

6-3-1 Being realistic

When participants spoke about the initial stage of their experience of using English, many highlighted the importance of changing their perception of English use. Erika's story is an example of where 'being realistic' was used as strategy of coping with the difficulties she faced. She realised that she did not have to fully understand everything that was being said to her.

Excerpt 3 - Erika

E: At the beginning, when I was in California, I felt like I didn't understand anything at all because they spoke so fast. So I recorded all the conversations and played them back later. Gradually I got used to it, and then I no longer needed to record them.

R: So at the time, most of your communication was centred on face-to-face conversation, right?

E: That's right; before the meetings, I had to write [e-mails] to make appointments... but after that, I talked in English face-to-face.

R: You mentioned that it was tough at the beginning, but how long did it take you, until you felt you were used to..?

E: Maybe after three or four business trips.

R: What changes do you think made you feel comfortable about using English?

E: Let me think…Well, I was taking notes, recording conversations …and I realised that I was actually correctly grasping the key points, even though I wasn't necessarily following everything and understanding all the details. At the beginning, I tried to understand every little piece, and I struggled…I replayed the recordings if I hadn't understood everything completely, but eventually I got tired, ran out of time, and gave up. I guess I got a bit 'lazy'. You know, I realised that if I understand the bigger picture, once I understand…if I get the important messages, then I don't need to understand all the bits and details of what they said.

When Erika started using English at work, she found listening was overwhelmingly difficult because she thought she needed to understand 'every little piece' of what clients said to her. She soon found that this was not necessary, and that it was practically impossible within her limited time frame. She realised that she could manage her tasks if she understood the 'bigger picture'. Her attitude of being 'realistic' and 'pragmatic' in using English was also not limited to listening. She has a similar 'tip' for when speaking English which provided an explanation as to why she can communicate verbally in English when her colleagues cannot.

Excerpt 4 - Erika

R: So do you sometimes go on business trips with Japanese colleagues? When that happens, do they speak in English or in Japanese?

E: Let me see… overall, many people roughly understand what they are hearing, but they tend to be unable to put their thoughts into words…

R: Why do you think that's the case?

E: I do wonder why they often ask [me to speak for them, rather than speaking themselves]. They're like "when I was listening to their explanation, I did not understand this point, so can you ask this for me?" or "I think I roughly understand from their explanation, but

I do not understand why this is like this….please ask it for me…" I think they just can't speak out. I think they want to ask something specific, but they can't come up with the right English on the spot. Then they ask me to translate for them. The contents are often not too complicated, and when they hear me ask in English, they realise it wasn't such a difficult thing to say and they'll say, 'oh, I could have asked that'…So it's more like, they can't come up with the appropriate phrases spontaneously.

R: What make it possible for you to come up with suitable phrases?

E: Experience I think…I am used to using English…I learned from my experience that it is okay to use ***simple English like that of junior high school students***. What we want to ask is something simple…like… 'Why is this like that?' or, 'how about this?' What we want to ask is that simple, so it's not an issue of English knowledge. But…when they think of what they want to ask, first in Japanese sentences, then… they cannot come up with an exact English translation. They can come up with...just words… some [English] words, but they cannot transform them into [English] sentences as they can in Japanese. If I suggest some ideas to them, then, they say "oh, I see…it's that simple", and they understand. They don't think they can communicate using such simple English, ***they think they have to speak in good English.*** So it's not lack of knowledge of English…it's the experience of knowing that junior high school level English is good enough…words are enough to convey the message…just use English like that.

(Emphasises for the discussion below)

In Erika's story, she expresses her view that it is possible to communicate using 'junior high school level English', and she believes that her colleagues have reached that level of English. Erika observes that her colleagues are under the impression that they have to use 'good English' and consequently, they feel that their limited English skills are not sufficient for asking questions. Therefore, they opt for the easy alternative to speaking out by asking Erika to translate their questions. Whilst Erika explains how her colleagues decide not to speak out, she also provides a tip how she could become able to use English at work. Mori tells a similar story.

Excerpt 5 - Mori

M: I couldn't really speak [English] until I had no option but to do so at work.

R: I see.

M: At the beginning, my communication consisted of very basic placements of words... I had no alternative, and that's all I could do. Then the other person [his interlocutor] would ask me, "is this what you meant?" That was how the conversation developed. But then as I gained more experience, I improved drastically.

Mori accepted that he had to communicate in a very simple way, as 'he had no option' but to speak out. By taking himself out of his comfort zone, Mori gained experience of using English. He clearly suggests that forcing himself to use English, albeit on a very basic level, provided a trigger which allowed him to improve his English through trial-and-error. His attitude is a clear contrast to that of Erika's colleagues who do not think that communication on such a basic level is acceptable. Therefore, they never 'start' speaking English. Later in his talk, Mori says that even now, after few decades of using English, he still feels that he can 'only convey essential things in English' and it is important for him to accept his 'limitations'. He adopted this attitude of 'being realistic' when communicating in English throughout his career. Similarly, Takeda feels that he speaks a 'different' English to 'everyone else'. He had such a feeling because he could only communicate in English 'by stretching what he learned at entrance-exam' in the Japanese schooling system. These words echo the comments of German managers in Ehrenreich's study. The German managers said that they only needed "bad English" (Ehrenreich, 2010) to fulfil their assignment. This flexible attitude of BELF users is pointed out by many researchers (Ehrenreich, 2009; Koester, 2010; Pitzl, 2005; Rogerson-Revell, 2008).

It is also clear that both Erika and Mori believe that accumulating experience of using English is vital to becoming an effective BELF user. Itoh's story provides further support to these findings.

Excerpt 6 - Itoh

Itoh is a business person who has worked in *Shosha* (trading companies) for over 30 years. During this period he gained experience of using English in countries all over the world. In this excerpt, he talks about his experience of working in Singapore and reflects upon the time when he started speaking in English. He originally found it difficult to speak out, but his encounter with the Singlish (the variety of English spoken by Singaporeans) changed his attitude.

I: When I was in Singapore, I realised…you can communicate [in English] like 'Non Can Do Lah', can't you? But, actually nobody [in Japan] thought they could communicate in this way, and neither did I. At first, I resisted from speaking English. English for practical use is clearly different from English for passing exams. I always told myself that I could communicate with broken English. My perception of English has changed over time. At the beginning, I told myself that I have to speak even in broken English, and I spoke as much as possible… I forced myself to speak in English no matter what. Then, as I became more experienced, my English improved to a point where I felt reasonably confident… a level that is somewhat acceptable…but until I got to that stage, I always encouraged myself to speak.

Itoh observes that Japanese people in general, including himself, initially feel that 'English for practical use' is the same as 'English for passing exams'. However, he soon came to realise that this was not the case. As Japanese exams place significant emphasis on grammar, especially at the time when he was at school, Itoh appears to suggest that he felt the need to be grammatically correct in order to speak 'good' English. Itoh's comment that he had to 'always encourage' himself to speak indicates that even after he knew that he did not have to speak 'good' and grammatically correct English, he was still hesitant to use English differently from his idea of 'how English should be spoken'. This 'mental barrier', seems to be widely shared among Japanese BELF users as Erika explains about her colleagues (In this chapter, Excerpt 4).

6-3-2 Accumulating experiences

Itoh's story clearly demonstrates that he considers accumulating experience of using English is critical in order to become an effective BELF user. In a similar fashion, Wakaya stresses the importance of experience, especially when it comes to negotiating the initial and most challenging stage of using English. As a manager of overseas international projects, Wakaya provides an alternative perspective to Itoh.

Wakaya's Story

Wakaya's current job is to organise and overlook technology transfer projects in different countries, and one of his many roles is to assign engineers to work in project sites abroad. He finds himself using English when working abroad, but the engineers he works with are often rather different. In his consulting firm, the majority of engineers are loaned from a large and leading technology firm in Japan.

Excerpt 7 - Wakaya

W: Engineers [who are sent from the parent company to abroad to work for his projects] often have over 20 years of engineering experience, although some have less. But they've normally had no overseas experience. All of them have graduated from top universities, so they are equipped with the basics in English.

R: And by basics, you're referring to English learnt for entrance examination purposes?

W: Yes, that's correct. Once they've removed the rust from their English, they are able to communicate using the language. With their language skills restored… when coupled with their 20 or more years of experience in the field, they become highly productive workers.

R: And how long does it take for them to be able to communicate effectively in English again?

W: Maybe a year or a year and a half.

R: That long?

W: Yes, it takes that long. For those people, it may seem like they've been dropped in the deep end, right from the beginning. Some people become extremely stressed at the beginning. But then again, you need to push people into the pool, and force them to learn how to swim.

R: Does everyone experience that?

W: Yes, everyone. And if you can't manage, you leave this industry.

R: Is it a matter of language skills?

W: To some extent, but also experience. Even when they're abroad, they need to be put in situations where they have to speak English; otherwise, it just doesn't work. If they don't push themselves to speak, they can't speak. If they hesitate, they can't speak. That's why when we have an opportunity to give a presentation, we try to use younger workers as much as possible. We need to give them the experience of using English. Even if they're reading from notes rather than speaking in presentation, it still helps to build confidence.

Wakaya stresses the importance of experiences of using English. However, as he clearly indicates, the engineers find it difficult to use English and as Itoh previously mentioned, there is a need to be pushed or encouraged to speak in English. Wakaya puts forward his belief that experience of using English helps to build 'confidence' in novice users of the language. Ehrenreich stresses that the flexible use of language is 'learnt from practice; being tried and re-examined in day to day business' (2010), and from the two excerpts above, it is evident that both Itoh and Wakaya support her argument.

6-3-3 Learning how to repair

Another point made by participants is the importance of learning to repair communication breakdowns. Typically, as Erika explains, there is a need to ask questions to clarify what has been said or agreed upon.

Excerpt 8 - Erika 3

R: So there weren't more difficulties?

E: Nowadays, if I don't understand, I ask the speaker to repeat himself/herself. I became gradually impudent @@... I asked questions for clarification. At the beginning, when I asked one question in my interview, I often had loquacious answers, and I understood nothing. Then I even could not ask questions for clarification. All I could do was to listen to the entire conversation on the audio recorder later…but…I gradually learned how to ask questions well. How to ask them to repeat. It is important when you use English for business.

Similarly, drawing upon his experience of dealing with Indian clients and the challenges that come with such an experience, Kitami argues that it is critical to ask 'clever' questions to clarify anything that remains unclear. He understands that asking such 'clever' questions for clarification poses a significant challenge for young subordinates. As such, he suggests that one of the first skills young subordinates should acquire is the ability to ask questions for clarification. Erika and Kitami believe that this is a significant challenge, especially for less experienced English users, for two reasons. Firstly, the individual has to decide what he/she needs to ask amongst a clutter of information and words that he/she only partially understands. Erika's story illustrates one such situation. Early on in her career, she could not separate what had to be understood amongst a clutter of words which were delivered quickly, and consequently she was unsure of what questions she should ask. Sunaoshi points out that 'understanding is not 'all or nothing'. Rather, it is a continuum' (Sunaoshi, 2005) and 'understanding in practice is the art of choosing what to know and what to ignore in order to proceed with our lives' (Wenger, 1998: 41). BELF users are often observed as being good at repairing communication breakdowns (Pitzl, 2005; Ehrenreich, 2010) and the above stories exhibit that this was a vital skill which participants needed to acquire through their own practical experiences.

6-3-4 Learning how to listen

The accumulation of practical experience seems to also be an effective way in which individuals can become better listeners, especially when it comes to listening to unfamiliar accents and varieties of English. Kitami's story clearly illustrates the importance of practical experience for improving listening skills.

Kitami's story

Kitami did not particularly enjoy English when he studied natural sciences at university. Once he started a job, and after only a week of training he was assigned in a section that focused solely on Indonesia. Soon after, he went to Indonesia for his first business trip; in fact, this was the first time he had been abroad.

Excerpt 9 - Kitami

Y: I could not understand the English spoken by the customs officer, her Indonesian English was difficult to understand.

R: Indonesian English?

Y: When she said the word 'invoice', she pronounced Vs as Fs. Her pronunciation was more like 'infoice'. I just couldn't understand her at all at the beginning. Well, it was my first time going on a plane and going abroad. And, I did not understand the English at all...so I straight away felt that I was out of my depth.

Meanwhile, Itoh struggled to understand the English spoken by his Saudi Arabian clients. They also happened to be his first clients.

Excerpt 10 - Itoh

R: [In Saudi Arabia] Did you use English? Or Arabic?

T: Some used Arabic, but I used English. The Saudi Arabian clients in my field tended to be very well educated, and many had studied abroad. They had a definite accent, and couldn't pronounce the letter P. It made their English harder for me to understand. I got through those three months. I had difficulties, mainly in listening, especially at the beginning. But they weren't native speakers, and that meant it was easier to understand them once I got used to the accent. They pronounce each word clearly and it was blocky, you know? My impression at the time was 'non-natives' are easier to understand. I think my level of English at the time was too low, anyway, to understand fluent English.

R: Did you really feel…your English was that bad at the time?

T: Absolutely. My main issue was listening. My level of reading and writing was about the same as my Saudi clients, as was our speaking. But, listening…especially at the beginning, I couldn't follow what they were saying…but I think they understood what I was saying. I had to communicate, not only with Saudi Arabians, but also with Norwegians and other Europeans. There were quite a few Europeans there. Europeans were more fluent. People from countries like Norway or the Netherlands, you'd expect them to be pretty good anyway...their English was more difficult to understand. But my important business discussions were with Saudi Arabians. They did not use complicated expressions. Their vocabulary was easy to understand. It was different from the [English spoken by the] British.

Both Kitami and Itoh found it difficult to get used to the unfamiliar accents of Indonesians and Saudi Arabians respectively, but as they became aware of some 'rules' which they followed when speaking, it became far easier. In particular, Itoh clearly states that the English spoken by Saudi Arabians was easier to understand than the English spoken by Europeans and native speakers. He attributes this to the use of a 'blocky', more simple sentence structures and more basic expressions and vocabulary. The stories told by Kitami and Itoh clearly support the suggestions by academics that BELF users find native English speakers more difficult to listen to (e.g. Sweeney & Zhu, 2010). However, it is important to note that Itoh found European non-native speakers as hard to understand as native speakers. It is not simply a difference between 'native and non-native' speakers' dichotomies he is talking about, but differences between all kinds of English speakers.

6-3-5 School English

As discussed in Chapter 1-2, the incompetence of Japanese people's English in general is typically blamed upon what many consider an outdated system of English teaching at school. Participants of this study all agreed explicitly or implicitly that 'the Japanese government curriculum guideline' is not sufficient at preparing future BELF users for the world of work. As mentioned previously, this is made evident by the fact that all the participants in this study who smoothly transitioned to using English at work had gained practical experiences of using English outside of the school curriculum.

The majority of participants were highly critical of the way in which English was taught as a subject at university. Some claimed that the courses were 'useless' or a 'waste [of time]'. It is widely agreed that English up to high school level in Japan is taught almost solely for the purpose of passing entrance exams. Though most participants were critical of the school system, all participants directly or indirectly admitted that the English skills they acquired at school formed the base on which more practical and pragmatic English skills could be built. The majority of participants mention that studying English at school was beneficial for widening vocabulary range and learning grammar. Many of them also credit the lessons in school for providing a solid foundation in reading and writing. For instance, Kitami was able to manage his work through combining 'exam English and school English' when he was first stationed in Indonesia for his work. Although Wakaya says that his English school education was 'ordinary entrance-exam level English', he also says that he 'stretched' this English for use at work. Reflecting upon his time at school, he portrays the English he was taught at school in a positive light, although he simultaneously points out that he had a 'lot of room for improvement'.

Contrary to reading and writing, all participants say that they had developed very limited listening and speaking skills at school. For instance, Takeda was 'able to read and write, but had almost no conversation skills at all'. Itoh says that his conversation skills were limited to the level that he could do shopping in English, but, at the initial stage, English skills for entrance exams was enough to read and write at work, except for business terminology which he needed to learn. He perceived that reading in 'the entrance-exam English' was more difficult than reading business documents in Singapore. Gotoh, who did not expect to use English at work but was sent to Sweden as a trainee, says that he had little problem in reading and writing in English, thanks to his English skills that he had acquired as a student. However, he found that listening was difficult as his 'ears [were] not used to [the] sounds of English' and 'it was painstaking' to listen to English.

Some participants saw school education in a far more negative light. For example, Bando felt that the English lessons he received had undesirable implications.

Excerpt 11 - Bando

B: My English lessons at junior high school were horrible…especially pronunciation. The sound TH was taught as *Za* [Japanese sound]. In high school, English was taught only for entry examination purposes. For pronunciation, only accents were taught [because entrance exams often asked about accents].

R: So how do you evaluate your English at school?

B: I would say zero. I knew grammatical terms such as the 'present continuous tense' and 'past particle' well…so, I should not say zero…but I feel it had a negative impact. Once I started university, the English lessons were empty, and I hated them. But when I was in the second or third year, I had a conversation class taught by British or American people, and it was interesting. It was something new…

Hanna and Naomi raised similar concerns about the education they had received. They both feel that their speaking skills are relatively weak compared to other skills, even after a few decades of using English at work, and they both factor this weakness back to lack of training of oral skills during their time at school. It is surprising that they apportion blame for their perceived deficiencies in English to events that occurred several decades ago, especially given that only 3000 hours were allocated to learning English over the span of their time at school in Japan. Whilst this may simply be down to perception, this brings up the possibility that education at school has far-reaching implications that last decades even after individuals become mature BELF users.

6-3-6 Professional vocabulary

Learning technical terms, or the vocabulary of the professional field was repeatedly mentioned by participants as necessary for the successful use of English at work. This topic was mentioned in most stories regardless of the fact that the participants had wide-ranging and different backgrounds. Honda's case is a typical example. He was a confident user of English and as discussed in Chapter 6-2-1, Excerpts 1-2. Regardless of this, he struggled to learn specialist and professional vocabulary in a 'very short time' frame. Meanwhile, Momo came to realise that whilst the level of English had not particularly improved over her career, there was a significant change in the vocabulary that was regularly used in discussions and in writing.

Excerpt 12 - Momo

M: Compared to English which I used during my time as a student, what changed the most was the vocabulary in this industry. If you ask about the level of English, not much has changed. There is some vocabulary necessary for this industry, and the vocabulary we use is routine.

Honda and Momo work in very different industries, namely trading and hospitality respectively (see table 1), but they both say that they have specific terminology that is of utmost importance to function properly at work. As Momo points out, whilst learning specific words is rather simple, it is useful throughout an entire career in the industry. In his story, Mori explained how he went about learning the professional vocabulary that was required in his profession.

Excerpt 13 - Mori

R: When you started, were the English skills you had acquired at university enough?

M: No, it was not enough.

R: What was lacking specifically?

M: The technical vocabulary of the industry. When I guided project sites, I could say 'why it was like this' or 'how it works', but I could not say 'what' it was, because I did not know the technical terms…It happened quite often. For instance, when I was going to guide a construction site, though I did not write down word to word…I simulated in my mind how I was going to explain things such as 'the purpose of the construction', 'what is going on in the construction', or 'what is the key technologyy'. Then, I listed the important vocabulary in Japanese. Then, I made a list of all the words I needed …and I translated roughly, each of the technical terms, using a dictionary. But… having said that, it wasn't like 1000 or 2000 words that I needed…well, if I count, if I learned 100, it was more than enough. It wasn't something impossible.

According to Mori, his technical vocabulary only consists of 100 words, and he could self-learn the words using a dictionary because he already knew these technical words in Japanese. Kaga also tells a similar story of how he could guide his clients around project sites, but only after learning the technical vocabulary. Many participants developed business knowledge and professional vocabulary in Japanese before they started using English at work. This was especially the case with participants who started using English in the middle of their career. Although these participants may not have been linguistically strong in English at the time, they already had solid business knowledge and language repertories in Japanese.

6-3-7 Training for the newly hired

Many participants recalled that they had English training provided by the company upon joining. In Japan, up until the early 1990s, many young people entered the labour market immediately after graduation as full time workers with no fixed-term contracts (Kosugi, 2003), and many worked in one company for their entire career, or until their mid to late fifties. The majority of participants in this study have worked under one, lifelong employer. As will be seen in the following stories, this seems to motivate employers to provide generous new hire training, and a step-by-step transitional system over several years to assist workers in the process of becoming effective BELF users. Daiwa was just one of many BELF users in Japan who received training from his employer.

Daiwa's story

Daiwa studied natural sciences at university, and as part of his degree, he read some papers in English. Other than that, he did not undertake any additional studies in English. When he decided to join *Shosha*, he was 'expecting to use English at work', but he thought that his English at the time was 'not at business level'. When he joined the company, he needed to take the standard test set by the company. He passed the written test, but he did not achieve the required level in his oral tests. As a result, his overall grade did not satisfy the requirement to go on business trips abroad. Consequently, he was ordered to take English conversation classes which were paid for by the company. For two years, he attended English conversation classes, whilst he was working in a position with domestic responsibilities. When he started engaging in business overseas, he felt he was able to speak English better than two years ago although the lessons had not been particularly practical. For some time after he was transferred to a section of oversea business, he was assigned a senior colleague who would check his English telexes and supervise him when writing to ensure that the style was appropriate. On the whole he did not find the experience challenging because it was a 'step-by-step' process which his company had assisted through systematic support and assignments that became gradually harder with time.

6-4 Those who could not become BELF users

As mentioned, all of the participants say that they eventually became able to use English at work, but some participants talked about colleagues who could not overcome this hurdle. This section focused on these workers who 'could not become BELF users'. I begin by introducing Kaga's observation about the engineers who 'could not become BELF users'. Kaga was talking about how he manages large development projects abroad.

Excerpt 14 - Kaga

R: So, in the next phase, you're going to send engineers from your company, right? Is it easy for them?

A: Yes, I send engineers, but most of them are not good at English. So we send an interpreter with them to Indonesia. What I found interesting though, is that as long as they know the technology, they can exchange information, even if they are not okay in English. Basically, the interpreter informs the engineers on what is about to be discussed. It serves as a fundamental base for the following conversation. Having done that, most engineers can communicate by themselves, even if they don't really speak the language…

R: In such cases, you've known that engineers eventually manage in that situation from your previous experience, but from the engineers' own perspective, it's a tough position to be in surely?

A: Yes, exactly. They often panic. That's why they study beforehand, and our company supports them…but it is a critical phase. If the engineers cannot overcome this phase [of getting used to communicating in English], I don't think they could work in that position…

R: Are there any engineers who cannot overcome that phase…? Or do all engineers manage somehow?

A: This is of course, a crucial aspect…as we have some engineers who cannot overcome this phase. I think HR [human resource department] looks at their ability, and only sends engineers who they think can overcome that phase. I think they send…in a good sense, I would say, people who can compromise...who can bluff, to a certain extent…

R: I see, I see

A: When they don't understand something, it depends on whether they can accept that and compromise...That's why, you know, there are some excellent engineers, who have superb knowledge in technology, who we expect would be able to make some wonderful contributions to our project… but as I said, if they cannot overcome this barrier because of their character, they are not suitable for work in this field.

Based on his experience of sending many engineers aboard, Kaga considers the critical condition to become BELF users is not how much English skills they have before they are sent, but the personality and willingness to accept the situation and compromise with the limited English skills they possess. This reflection is very similar to the issue of 'mental barriers' and 'being realistic' I discussed in Chapter 6-4-3. Wakaya also sends many engineers abroad and he makes some very similar observations. In Chapter 6-3-2 (Excerpt 7), Wakaya said that he believes that English is best learned from experience; therefore he has to 'push people into the pool, and force them to learn how to swim'. However, he also says that when people actually face such situations, they initially become highly stressed. Later, he continues by saying that there are some people who are unable to handle this situation'. He said 'I guess this way of learning doesn't suit everyone' and 'it is up to whether individuals are up for it, how proactive they are'.

Erika mentioned in Chapter 6-3-1 (Excerpt 4) that her colleagues do not speak English because they are in a fixed state of mind as to what 'correct' and 'good' English is and they feel a need to speak in this very particular way. Itoh, who became an extremely skilful user of BELF in his later life, also needed to encourage and force himself to speak out in English which he was not fully content with. Kaga called this a 'compromise' and Wakaya called this as being 'proactive' but they both refer to a common issue. In summary, they argue that in order to become BELF user, Japanese participants have to accept the reality of what is possible within their existing English skills, and they have to give up an idea of some 'idealised form of English' they have in their mind. This idealised form is implanted in the minds of potential BELF users long before they enter the job market. There is a possibility that this process starts during individuals' first exposure to English in their Japanese school.

6-5 Two factors of the transition

When participants talk about their initial experience, I often asked them how long it took for them to feel comfortable using English at work. For some participants with strong English skills, this transition time was relatively short. Honda says it took one week, and Fumie says three months. For engineers who have limited English skills, according to Wakaya, it usually takes a year to a year and a half. When Daiwa reflects upon the time when he worked in Istanbul, his first assignment abroad, he says he worked 'totteringly', for around one year. Yoshimi says that he felt he 'still [had a] long way to go' at the end of his first year, but was able to handle his daily routine by the end of his second year in his trainee position in an international organisation. It is clear that the length of the transition varies widely from person to person.

Analysing participants' stories focusing on 'the school-to-work transition' of becoming BELF users, it emerged that this transition can be deconstructed into two different categories; one is the time it takes to get used to English, or what I call the transition from being **a learner of English** to **a user of English,** whilst the other is the transition **from using English in a student context to using the language in a business context.**

6-5-1 Transition from learners to users

The transition from being **a learner of English** to **a user of English** can happen anytime when participants start using English. Therefore for participants who had a smooth and short transition period, this process was already completed by the time they entered the job market.

This ’transition from being an English learner to an English user’ has been told by the majority of participants. Some, including Gotoh, Wakaya and Chika, had this experience when they went abroad, and found it difficult but enjoyable. Some, including Yoshimi, Daiwa, and Itoh underwent the transition when they started using English for professional purposes, and found the experience difficult but eventually manageable.

Ryoko tells vivid stories of how she felt when she experienced this transition. She first says that in Japan she ‘could learn English, but there was no chance to use it’. Then, she follows on by saying that when she studied in the US, her perception of English changed.

Excerpt 15 - Ryoko

Re: Did you have any difficulties?

Ry: I’d studied English in Japan, but I did not have any experience of speaking it in daily life. It was my first experience of speaking or communicating... and since it was my first experience, of course it was difficult, but I enjoyed. I did enjoy it… even though I was often unable to convey what I wanted to say. Until then, I had learned English through my eyes, but then, for the first time, I felt like I was learning through my ears…

Re: So you mean, in California, your image of English changed?

Ry: By going to California, English changed from something I studied but didn’t have the chance to use, to something I could use. Once I started using English, I found that I could communicate and I enjoyed it. This changed my perception of English for sure.

She explains the transition in an enjoyable and warm tone and it is clear that going to California was a highly enlightening and eye-opening experience for Ryoko. Many participants adopted a similarly ‘positive’ attitude when explaining their transition from being a learner to being a user of English. This type of attitude might be what Wakaya meant by being ‘proactive’ in his story in Chapter 6-4. For some people, this transition could be a ‘compromise’ which requires the user to be ‘realistic’ in order to overcome the ‘mental barrier’ (Chapter 6-3-1).

6-5-2 Transition to business context

The other component in the process of becoming a BELF user is **the transition from the student context to the business context.** As Fumie explains, this transition is needed even if one is already a skilful English user.

Fumie's Story

Having been inspired by a TV show, Fumie decided that she wanted to become a translator when she was 9 years old, and developed her very strong English skills throughout her time as a student. Therefore she had full confidence in her career, and she was hired by an American company. She says that the transition was relatively smooth but that there were still some things to be learnt.

Excerpt 16 - Fumie

F: When I started my job, I had no problems with English. The company had 'its unique style' and unique vocabulary for English, and thus I needed to learn this style, especially when writing. As I said, I already had a solid foundation in English, so I said to myself, "okay, that is the style I will write in". There were sample documents produced by senior colleagues, such as memos and recommendations. Referring to those samples, I understood how documents were constructed and how conclusions were drawn, and I adjusted my style. It was not very difficult, and after a few trials, I was able to write my documents without looking at the samples. I needed to learn, but it was not a big deal.

What she explain is a transition from the English she used as a student to the English she used in the professional context. This transition covers learning vocabulary and styles of English specifically for the profession or company as discussed in Chapter 6-3-6. This transition is told by many participants, regardless of their level of English. Therefore, this is considered a necessary step in the initial stage of English use at work.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the initial stages of BELF users' transition from being a learner at school to a user at work has been discussed. It was confirmed by BELF users that the English education they received in the Japanese schooling system was not enough to prepare them for a smooth transition to becoming successful BELF users. Nonetheless, the English taught in Japanese schools provided a foundation of grammar, reading skills and vocabulary that would prove useful in business. Participants' stories about the transition reveal that the process could be split into two sub-transitions. The first is the transition from being a learner of English to a user of English and this transition can happen whenever an individual starts using English. During this transition, it is especially important for individuals to be realistic about their limitations and for individuals to use their limited English skill set to the best of their abilities. The other is a transition from being a student to being a part of a business, and this transition is a necessary step in the initial stage of using English successfully at work. In the following chapter, I shift my discussion to participants' experiences after they settled down and matured into BELF users.

Chapter 7: Negotiating challenges as a BELF user

Introduction

In this chapter, I analyse and discuss Japanese BELF users' stories about their experiences of using English throughout their business career. In the previous chapter, the focus was on the initial stage of using English in business contexts, and I argued that business people have to go through some processes to become a 'user of English at work' from being a 'learner of English at school'. In this chapter, I shift my focus to 'beyond the initial stage', analysing the narratives of BELF users to discuss what challenges they face in their BELF communication, how they make sense of their challenges in use of English, and how they negotiate their use of English in their business contexts.

7-1 Challenges

The initial discussion in this chapter focuses on what participants find difficult or challenging. I aim to identify and illustrate reoccurring situations where participants spoke of 'significant challenges' they faced when using English to perform their business tasks and goals. The term 'significant challenges' refers to difficult 'tasks' that are important to achieve their 'goals' in business. During interviews, participants spoke of a series of experiences using English in their business career, typically in chronological order. I asked participants either explicitly or implicitly if there was any experience which they perceived as being significant challenges at each stage of their career, and if so, why they perceived it to be that way. Because the contexts and trajectories of participants' business careers vary widely, their challenges also ranged significantly. Looking through the difference in contexts, I looked into elements of 'what' and 'why' in their challenging experiences and coded them based on my reading of participants' practical situations and intentions. This process initially produced over 20 different codes of challenging situations, and after examining similar codes and regrouping them, I hereby propose five themes to which 'significant challenges' can be categorised. The first three themes are characterised as 'situations' and the latter two as 'intentions'. Those five themes are 'participating in meetings', ' writing in business', 'reading in volume', 'risk of making mistakes' and 'lower productivity', and they were selected based on how widely challenges were shared among participants, as well as on how significant the challenges perceived to be in attaining business goals.

7-1-1 Participating in meetings

Many participants have said that participating in meetings in English has been a crucial and difficult challenge required in their business. It is agreed by many participants that participating in meetings with two parties is relatively easy, but once the meeting involves more than two parties, it becomes significantly more difficult. 21 participants told stories when they felt frustrated during meetings in English in some form, and Yoshimi's story of internal meetings in Kenya is one of them. He explains that meetings were with people of different countries.

Excerpt 17 - Yoshimi

Y: …it was an international organisation. Pakistani English, Indian English, Philippine English, see, you are showered with every variety of English like a machine gun.

R: How did you find to put your opinion forward among such speakers?

Y: It wasn't possible at all. When we had meetings, I couldn't say anything, it was humiliating. I was left out because I could not take my turn to say something…

Many participants say they often remain silent during meetings, because it is difficult to take turns to put forward their opinion when they are engaging with more competent speakers of English. Yoshimi finds such a situation 'humiliating'. Honda tells a similar story albeit from a third-person perspective. He observed that many Japanese business people 'lose arguments' during meetings because of 'silence', and I asked him why he thinks this is the case.

Excerpt 18 - Honda

H: First of all, language…they may be able to speak logically in Japanese but not in English – that is why. When we have meetings in East Asia, many Japanese people keep silent, maybe because they don't want to make errors in grammar. But if you care about making errors, you cannot say anything.

R: I see,

H: I often say that if you speak, you can learn… I think they should speak…I guess they think it is face-losing to speak [in English with errors]….

Honda factors 'silences' to apprehension, and his comments may be a typical perception among Japanese people. However, when participants tell stories of their own 'silence', their perception is more complex. In Nishii's case, the speed of discussion was the reason for his silence, rather than an unwillingness to speak.

Excerpt 19 - Nishii

N: During discussions, I understood what others said and I made sense of their points, then, I considered what I wanted to say. By the time I had come up with what to say, the flow of the discussion had already changed. I couldn't put forward my ideas anymore.

Tanaka and his colleagues (Du-Babcock & Tanaka, 2010) studied turn-taking of Japanese people during meetings, and concluded that Japanese people tend to take turns after listening to others' opinions. On the contrary, others tend to take turns earlier, expressing their opinions prematurely. Consequently, they co-construct opinions through interaction with others. Co-constructing opinions during meetings requires on-line communication with participants, and Nishii's story may explain users' own perspective of why it is difficult for some to co-construct arguments during meetings.

Ryoko's story is also about the difficulty of taking a turn in a 'global meeting' where English is used as a lingua franca.

Excerpt 20 - Ryoko

Ry: I understand English, and I have no problem with it at all so long as I work in the office in Japan. But once I go to global activities, it's completely different. For instance, global meetings. We occasionally have a global meeting held abroad with over 60 people coming from all over the world. In such meetings, we have a few Japanese and all others are foreigners. During these meetings, I can't come up with my opinion smoothly.

Re: Why not? Can't you come up with your own opinion?

Ry: Yes, I can do that in English…but…I don't know if you can call it a problem with English. I feel overwhelmed...because everybody speaks lots. I cannot take turns, and those who are speaking do not care for others who don't speak… 'Never mind', I felt and then I would just become a listener…

Re: I see.

Ry: Then, my frustrations build up. We have more teleconferences nowadays. If you have teleconferences, it is even more…how can I phrase this, the hurdle to participate gets harder to overcome…

Re: The participants include lots of non-native speakers, right?

Ry: Yes, a wide variety of Englishes are flying around…We have many Asians. Singaporean English, Indian English and of course Japanese English… lots of varieties.

Re: But non-native speakers speak a bit slower, don't they?

Ry: No, not at all. I think Japanese do not… I wonder why…We are all Asians, but Koreans, Indians, and also Chinese …are more competent in English…

Ryoko is a skilled English user with solid training and experience who is considered a capable English speaker among colleagues in the Japanese office of a MNC. She was willing to speak out, and she was not afraid of making errors, but she could not take a turn in meetings. She felt overwhelmed by the strong command of English and aggressiveness of fellow non-native speakers especially by those from other Asian countries. She does not consider this her own personal issue, but she sees the difficulty as a common problem amongst Japanese colleagues. She later says if other non-native English speakers from Asia did not speak so well, she would probably not feel as overwhelmed. She takes for granted that native speakers are stronger in speaking in English, but she feels more pressured when she finds that other non-native speakers are also much better than her when it comes to speaking in English during such meetings.

Wakaya puts forward his opinion that 'silence' of Japanese business people during meetings is not only because of a language issue, but also because of the culture in Japanese corporations.

Excerpt 21 - Wakaya

W: I often say that it is important for Japanese people to speak. It is not about speaking English without making errors. It is fine to make errors, and you should communicate in English of any form and shape. I think Japanese people hesitate to speak during meetings. Unless we change such characteristics, it will be difficult for Japanese people to go abroad to do business.

R: Do you feel this way based on your experiences?

W: Yes, it is through my own experience. I have seen so many Japanese people who do not speak. They tend to follow the Japanese culture… for instance they do not speak in front of bosses…they are participating in meetings [in English] whilst sticking to the Japanese meeting culture. For instance, during presentations, many foreigners ask questions which are irrelevant without hesitation…something that you may feel ashamed to ask about because the answer seems so basic and easy to get to. They are pretty much putting forward their own opinions rather than asking questions. We [Japanese] lack such a push.

R: Why do you feel this way? Are you the kind of person who can speak in front of bosses because of your own nature?

W: No. I don't speak in front of my Japanese boss @@. When you speak in English, when you go abroad, you have to change. Silence is not golden in English…You have to talk at the right time.

R: How did you learn this?

W: Well, I've been in this industry for many years. I have felt this way from the very beginning. When I was young, I was in Taiwan working with some Germans and French people. I was in a position to take care of other Japanese people…when they spoke in Japanese they were lively, but in English they said nothing. The Germans and the French spoke but not the Japanese. I felt that we were not able to export our technology because of this. I felt I needed to speak. Japan is dominated by 'company organisation' and in that organisation, silence is golden. If we want to sell our technology abroad, we have to be more aggressive.

R: You felt this way from very early on…

W: Yes, I noticed, but when I try [in English meetings], other Japanese people do not follow me. So I don't do it in front of Japanese people, as I am Japanese. I feel easier [to do so] when I attend meetings at The World Bank or other occasions when I team up only with foreigners.

The first part of Wakaya's analysis is similar to Honda's since he argues that the Japanese tend to be silent because they are afraid of making errors. However, he then adds that the silence of Japanese people is also the result of the Japanese corporate culture. His comments support discussions by Tanaka (2008) and Kameda (2000; 2001), who argue that the Japanese company culture of harmony and solidarity in English meetings has a negative influence. Wakaya also feels that non-Japanese people tend to 'ramble' from a Japanese standard point of view, but he also feels that even such attitudes may need to be embraced by the Japanese if they want to do business abroad.

Chika's story is far more complex and goes beyond mere taking turns in meetings. Previously, she tells a story when she was a junior staff, and how it was difficult for her to participate in multinational meetings and to put forward her points. She now proceeds to tell a story that encompasses some more complex issues.

Excerpt 22 - Chika

C: This time I was assigned to a position where I had to participate in a meeting as a boss, and I needed to be responsible for all of the negotiations.

R: The meeting was not 'one to one'?

C: No, the meeting involved multiple parties. The meeting involved many Westerner veterans of such meetings. The Westerners included both native and non-native speakers such as French people, but they all had extensive experience of such negotiations.

R: How did you survive?

C: I think I had solid knowledge of the background of the meeting by the time. [Among the participants] there were some nice people [but] …others were spiteful…those who were really nasty. But during the negotiations, some veterans pleaded and spoke out for non-native speakers who have handicaps in English, and tried to mediate the argument into an agreement. I could survive because of their help, I think@.

R: What do you think you were short of at the time?

C: Well, it is my persistent challenge… I think it is always difficult to initiate a new flow in a meeting, or change the flow…When I started attending these kinds of meetings, I thought it wasn't possible for me, so I gave up. I wrote my script and I thought it was enough for me if I could say what I wrote. But this time, I was the representative of my firm. If I missed the opportunity to state our firm's position, then I wouldn't be able to recover the chance afterwards… So, it was horrendously difficult to prepare in order to speak out at the right moment.

R: Could you do that if you had prepared well? But you would not know the flow of the meeting in advance…

C: Yes, that's why I had to think of a dozen different scenarios, speculate how the discussion would develop and simulate what I would say for each particular case. I also had to stop the meeting at times if I felt something unacceptable for my firm could be decided. I needed to stop without offending others. I think, there were ways to do that, and I needed to learn such ways. Gradually but firmly, I had to acquire such skills.

R: Wow, it is tough.

C: Yes, it was.

Later, I asked if attending such a meeting would be difficult no matter what language was used. She says that if the meeting had been in Japanese, she would have found it much easier to respond quickly on the spot and to co-construct her opinions during the meeting or otherwise to raise an objection to the flow of discussion. Her challenges involves not only taking turns but co-constructing opinions and changing the flow of meetings.

Itoh's story is about how he learnt to change the flow in multinational meetings which were largely governed by native speakers. He had regular meetings with representatives of companies from America, Britain, Norway, Russia and Japan regarding a long term, expensive and high stake development project. Itoh perceived that the Americans and Britons dominated meetings by speaking English garrulously and hastily amongst one another. Consequently, he observed that non-native speakers such as the Norwegians, Russians and Japanese felt uncomfortable with the way meetings were operated.

Excerpt 23 - Itoh

R: Do you think it was because of the culture or language?

I: I think it was related with the language, English. They are native speakers. My virtue is that I smoke during break time, and I can chat with other smokers. If Americans are among the smokers, I can talk to them one by one frankly…

R: I see.

I: We made decisions in the meetings based on voting. But the Americans were so talkative that they kept whining more than saying yes or no. Their talk was so unclear that we were not sure of their viewpoint and whether they were saying yes or no. So I proposed that they should express their position more clearly. They should restrict their talk only to put forward or affirm their position. When we vote, all amendments would be listed on a screen. I proposed such changes so that the minority groups [non-native speakers] could understand. The power balance of the meeting should be determined by the portion of voting rights each party possesses, which in turn should be determined by the portion of ownership of the project. This should be a rule of meetings. But, by talking lots, I felt that the Americans took advantage of their superior speaking ability. I didn't understand what they were talking about… I didn't like feeling drowned out by the high tempo in which they spoke…I told them to be clear and concise so that we can discuss ideas on the same level. The Russians did not say anything, but the Norwegians also had some objections [to the way that native speakers controlled the meeting].

Later in his talk, he presented his 'tactics' to attend such meetings.

I: It is important to have someone who supports you. Because my English was not good enough, I sometimes couldn't convey 100% of what I wanted and I couldn't persuade others the way I wanted to, right? That is why I spoke with American smokers and told them my feelings one to one. Then, when I said something during the meetings, they

> helped me. They explained to others like, 'what he wants to say is….' I think everybody [Japanese business people] who are in a similar situation to mine come up with some kind of strategies to negotiate in English. I think that's why everyone is doing fine in business.

At the time of this meeting, Itoh was already an experienced BELF user, having been a user of English in business for many years. His assignment to this position may show he was indeed appreciated in his organisation, an expert in international business, as a capable BELF user who was able to represent his company in such a critical and difficult meeting. However, he still feels his English competence was not enough at the meeting. An alternative interpretation is that because he was an experienced BELF user, he knew that he needed to have 'tactics' to 'win' his argument with his limited linguistic capacity in English. He further considers this a shared problem amongst Japanese business people who need to attend serious and tough business meetings in English. However, this experience is, from his point of view, told as a story of achievement to persuade eloquent native speakers in spite of his linguistic weaknesses. He shows his confidence that he can handle such difficult situations, perhaps most strongly demonstrated by the humorous tone and laughing manner in which he talks about his smoking habit. Bando's story shares similarities with Itoh's. Bando says that when he needed to win support from American clients, he always spoke to them individually before the meeting to establish some common ground and areas of agreement. By doing so, he says he could 'supplement his weaker argument' in English during the meetings. Their stories show competence for achieving performance in BELF communication is not limited to linguistic skills of English, but it involves non-linguistic 'tactics'.

Meetings are an important part of communication in business. Discussions during these meetings could determine future business, and hence, effective participation in business meetings is critically important for business people. Rogerson-Revell (2007; 2008) already reported that business discourse in multinational settings is more difficult than in bi-national settings for less proficient English speakers (Rogerson-Revell, 2007; 2008), and her research also reveals that these less proficient English speakers find it difficult to participate in international meetings. Participants' stories in this study firmly confirm her findings. This study also illustrates BELF users' own perspectives and sense making of these challenges. Some participants speak of their frustration or feelings of resignation, but some also tell stories about how they dealt with these challenges in order to become able to participate in the discussion more effectively. Because they perceive their competence in English to have some limitations, they 'judge' that it is difficult to ‘win overt discussions’ during meetings. As a result, these BELF users feel that they have to find other strategies such as building consensus and support outside of meetings or undertaking painstaking preparation.

I have to point out that participants who tell these stories are mostly very strong users of English, at least among Japanese business people, and are regarded as experts in overseas business by their colleagues. These stories indicate that seemingly ‘successful BELF users’ are not free from frustrations or challenges. They face new challenges, often more complex and difficult than before, even after they became relatively strong BELF uses. Finally, I also would like to point out that multinational meetings with multiple parties are relatively rare compared to meetings with two parties among the stories told by participants. However, participants say that multinational meetings are often more influential in determining the larger framework of their business, and therefore critical for Japanese firms according to participants.

7-1-2 Writing in business

Relatively fewer participants found writing at work challenging in comparison to listening and speaking. However, for some business people, writing business documents is an indispensable part of their tasks and roles which poses a persistent challenge. These participants are typically required to write complex English documents in a particular style, including internal memos or reports and external reports or letters. Ryoko, who was capable of writing business documents herself thanks to her extensive training at secretary school in English unlike her boss who could not.

Excerpt 24 - Ryoko

Ry: I mustn’t say this loudly, but…do you know ‘dictation’? My (Japanese) boss said the first line in English using routine opening sentences, then he said others in Japanese eloquently…and he would then say something like ‘please summarise that [in English] as a proposal’ @@

Re: @@

Ry: I was like a ghost writer.

Re: Really?

Ry: I was also surprised. I didn’t think that was my job. But because of this experience, I became able to write business English. I can now write by myself.

Re: Was the boss unable to write? Or did he not want to have trouble writing in English?

Ry: A bit of both I reckon. I don't think he could write well, and he didn't want to bother doing so either.

Ryoko's story reveals that in her firm, the Japanese boss, who has been successfully promoted in the office where English is used as a corporate language, was in fact, 'incapable' of writing documents in standard 'English business form', at least from her point of view. She perceives his difficulties to be something which should be kept 'secret', as she says that 'I mustn't say this loudly'. It is unknown how her boss actually perceived his own 'difficulty' of writing in English in standard business form. Regardless, it must have been inconvenient for him if he needed to ask for his secretary's assistance every time he needed to write some documents at work. Yoshimi also tells a similar story where he had to ask his secretary to write internal memos when he was working in an international organisation in Kenya because his own writing was returned from his boss since it was 'incomprehensible'. He found his 'inability' to write in English 'humiliating'. This perception towards being 'incapable' of writing in English as something rather embarrassing, appears to be affirmed by what Ryoko had to say.

Kitami, who was the top of the local subsidiary in India says that he also asked his secretary or Indian staff to write his documents, but that he interpreted this experience differently from Ryoko and Yoshimi. As a boss, he thinks that he had other tasks with higher priorities rather than writing documents himself. According to Kitami, even if he tries to write himself, the quality is not up to the level that the local Indian staff could produce. Therefore, he considers the assignment of his secretary and local staff to write his documents as a case of 'rational task sharing', rather than something he should be ashamed of. It should be noted that these BELF users are capable of verbally explaining their messages and thoughts, but they find forming sentences in business writing format more challenging.

Other participants who have needed to write rather long and complicated documents over their careers say this posed a significant challenge. For instance, both Adachi and Mori spoke in detail about how difficult it was to write research reports in the style of an official report to customers in English. In the case of Bando, when he worked for an MNC in Japan, he was repeatedly told by his colleagues that they could not understand what he meant in his English reports. He did not have a secretary that could write for him, and he found it painstakingly difficult to have to write up English documents.

However, the skill of writing English in business formats is not necessarily required for everyone. Most participants need to write in English in rather casual forms such as by e-mail, and no participants suggested that writing an e-mail was particularly challenging. For instance, Gotoh says that he often sends rather complicated memos by e-mail to his partner company in English. This was not difficult because there was no need to try to write in '*smart* English', as even native speakers make grammatical mistakes and spelling errors. He used '*smart*' in Japanese as a loanword, which typically means 'good looking' and/or 'clever' in Japanese. On the other hand, Yasuko says that some e-mails written in English by her Japanese clients are difficult to understand, and that her non-Japanese colleagues ask her to 'decipher' such messages. By applying her knowledge of the Japanese writing style, she is usually able to guess the writer's intentions. She adds that it was possible only because she knew and understood Japanese. She infers that this was because of the cultural and linguistic differences between the 'non-Japanese' and Japanese. This may suggest that participants' e-mails and other casual writing in English is not always easily understood, or could be easily misunderstood. Nonetheless, the participants believe that their e-mails in English have conveyed their messages successfully and that they have done their job. This illustrates the pragmatic and flexible use of English by Japanese BELF users in casual and daily writing.

7-1-3 Reading in volume

Challenges raised about reading were all concerned with volume of reading. Participants perceive reading smaller amounts of English documents as something manageable, but reading large volume of documents as something extremely challenging. For instance, when Bando attended graduate school in the US for his career development, he needed to read an overwhelming amount of documents that even native speakers struggled to finish reading. Because he found that it was practically impossible to read all of them, he skimmed the documents and looked at important numbers and figures, using his imagination to make educated guesses about the content. However, in the real world of using English in business contexts, many participants need to read a large volume of documents with attention to detail in order to understand the consequent implications for their business. Itoh was one of those to face such a challenge.

Excerpt 25 - Itoh

I: When I had a job in development, it was a completely different stage. Lots of reading. Maybe, I read, within a half of a year… as much as I had read during the…previous 15-25 years. They were things… like contracts. Contracts I had read previously had a standardised form …and consisted of one or two pages, only. I only needed to read them once. Or, I read some industry magazines… I mean, it may be not such intense reading…I might only have to read specific parts of particular pages…. I knew what was written in which part [in those magazines]. But for this assignment, I had no choice but to read a large number of documents. I had a tough time reading so much. Furthermore, I'm always thinking about which sentences, which clauses carry risk or have leeway for misinterpretation.

R: And in which language do you think when you're going through this process?

I: Definitely Japanese. When I'm going through potential risks, the Japanese pops up spontaneously, naturally, and I'm thinking, "this is dangerous" or "this is ambiguous". Only then I can change things into English… This is something I can only do in Japanese.

He continued later.

I: When thick documents were written, of course I read from front to back. At the time, I stayed at work until 2 to 3 am almost every night. From what I remember, I hardly went back home before midnight. My ability to read at the time improved drastically…I've lost some of that ability since.

He described his situation as 'manageable' but he managed the situation in a 'workaholic' way. Chika also says that reading in volume was tough for her. When she attended regular international meetings, she was given a large volume of documents as reference materials. She says that in addition to the volume, looking up new vocabulary introduced in discussion topics made the task even more arduous.

Both Itoh and Chika were talking about lots of materials in preparation for international and multi-party meetings where English is used as a lingua franca. In the previous discussion (7-1-2), I illustrated how both Itoh and Chika felt their linguistic skills were 'weaker' than that of other members at the meetings and how they felt the need to find 'strategies' to compensate for their weak discussion skills during meetings. Outside of their meetings in BELF, they also had to read a large number of materials, which may have been a reasonable amount for some, but required 'unreasonable' effort to be put in by both Itoh and Chika. Wakaya tells a similar story.

Excerpt 26 - Wakaya

R: How about reading in English?

W: Of course, you can read in Japanese five times faster @@

R: Five times@@. You mean five times the speed or five times the accuracy?

W: Both@@.

R: Do you find any difference between reading a document of two pages and reading a book?

W: It is not painful to read something which is two pages long, but I often need to read reports over 100 pages long… I can only browse them…of course I read critical parts carefully…but it is painful to read long documents.

R: Do you mean, you understand and know what is written in what sections in these 100 page documents?

W: Yes, we understand them. If we didn't, it would be a disaster. The documents we read are similar, they follow the same style. If the report is not in our field, it is very difficult.

R: It may be rude to ask, but are there cases where you miss some important information in parts which you had assumed not to be particularly important…?

W: Of course, it happens quite often. Even in Japanese. I submitted a 300 page report in Japanese today, and I still found it difficult.

R: Could it happen in your tender documents as well?

W: No, I read tender documents with great care because they are related to money.

R: Even a document of 300 pages?

W: For legal parts, lawyers read carefully. We read the technology part. We read all the parts very carefully.

In his daily work, Wakaya and his team has to read tender documents published for invitation in English, has to submit their proposals in English and has to make reports of progress in English. Those documents are voluminous, with some as long as 300 pages. International tender documents usually use English as a lingua franca, so that any business in any country can read and submit similar documents. He says that this process requires him to read huge amounts, and that this is 'painful', as he can read five times faster in Japanese. If the documents were only a few pages long, such a difference in language would be somewhat manageable. However, because the documents are so long, the difference has significant impacts.

7-1-4 Risk of making mistakes

Wakaya's story of reading tender documents touches upon the risk of making 'mistakes' when doing business in English. It is stressed by many participants that not making 'mistakes' is the challenge they face when doing business in English. 'Mistakes', or *'machigai'* in Japanese could refer to some unfavourable and unintentional outcomes caused by the acts of participants. 'Mistakes' can happen even in Japanese communication, but participants believe that the risks of making 'mistakes' increase significantly if they communicate in English. No catastrophic stories of 'mistakes' are told by participants, but many speak about their efforts to minimise or prevent 'mistakes' during business communication in English.

Many participants say not making 'mistakes' is especially challenging for oral communication because it is more prone to misunderstanding and communication breakdown than written communication. Therefore, many participants elect to exchange written confirmations to summarise and agree upon what was said in meetings, phone calls, and video conferences. Itoh's story from when he was a trader in Singapore illustrates how easy it is to make mistakes, and how dangerous it can be.

Excerpt 27 - Itoh

R: Is there any danger of making a mistake?

I: It can happen. Because of the risk of making mistakes, I sent confirmation telexes immediately after exchanges. I had a scary experience around one month after I went to Singapore. I sold some commodities to my counterpart. I thought I sold 800K units. But when I received their confirmation, it was written as 80K. At first, I thought I had made a mistake. But then, after a while, I thought that I could have said eighteen instead of eight, but that I could not have said eighty instead of eight hundred thousand. So I concluded that it must have been their mistake. But I worried about it for 30 minutes after I received the confirmation. I should have said eight hundred thousand, but I've got eighty [in confirmation]… I thought my poor English may have caused this horrible error… I went completely pale for a while. It turned out that my counterpart had missed out a zero.

R: If this mistake had actually taken place, what would have happened next?

I: I wouldn't have known until we went to court. Decent firms record all telephone conversations, but there's always a risk of making mistakes.

He then adds his opinion that not making mistakes is the most critical challenge in business communication for anybody, especially in English. He goes on to state that business people should develop precautionary strategies to avoid mistakes when they communicate in English. He says this point.

Excerpt 28 - Itoh

I: Young people often exchange numbers in writing because they know their limited English speaking ability. This is fine so long as you don't make any mistakes. Mistakes can happen. In the worst case scenario, selling and buying can get mixed up.

Numbers are considered a potential source for mistakes. Yoshimi also says that he exchanges confirmation letters each time he has a telephone conversation. He says when dealing with million dollars, 'if a zero has been missed, it would be a disaster'. In Momo's case, she used interpreters to prevent any errors when she needed to convey the latest financial figures of her company in English for investors abroad. Momo was a relatively confident user of English, when she was a student, and she already had few years of experience of undertaking roles requiring English use.

Excerpt 29 - Momo

M: When I was in charge of Investor Relations (IR), I said I was not able to use English and I did not force myself into using English. I used an interpreter, a top-level one.

R: Why do you think you had to use an interpreter?

M: Myself? First of all, when we are talking about numbers, I cannot make any mistakes. Another problem is that I have not studied technical terms of finance in English properly.

R: Yes…

M: If I have an interpreter, I can have time to think carefully when she speaks, can't I? After all, IR is all about money, deciding whether they invest or not, no mistake is allowed.

Later I asked if she did felt that it may be 'face losing' to use an interpreter, because it may be interpreted by others as an inability to use English at all, when in fact, she is a strong BELF user. She was clear that 'not making mistakes' and being precise and accurate is the most important goal of her communication in IR, and she could not accept any risk of making mistakes.

Meetings are also considered a potential source of mistakes. Itoh again says that his regular meeting dealt with huge sums of money, and he was scary of making mistakes during meetings. He says that "regardless of English or Japanese, the structure of the business itself is scary. I cannot make an excuse based on the language…once you are assigned to the role, all you can do is to give it your best". As a way to prevent making mistakes, he prepared for meetings by reading documents thoroughly. In Kitami's case, he paid attention to every single word during meetings to prevent mistakes. His high-stakes negotiation with an Indian client was particularly complicated, and therefore he paid extra caution to every little detail and left no stone unturned. I asked him about the negotiations.

Excerpt 30 - Kitami

R: So you mean, you don't leave anything unclear..?

K: No. It's too risky. At the end, we sign and it becomes the final decision. When there's something I don't fully understand, I make that clear to the client I am negotiating with.

He continues to point out that it is ideal if he could understand 'everything perfectly', but that ordinary people who learn English in Japan have limitations and aren't able to do so. Later in his interview, Kitami summarises the difficulty of remaining error-free in negotiations.

Excerpt 31 - Kitami

R: Do you find negotiating in English more difficult than negotiating in Japanese?

K: I think it is more difficult. First of all, you cannot miss any words, clients may change a part of the agreement somewhere or even deny its existence, and if I miss such things, it would be a disaster…so I get nervous. In business, unless you listen word for word, you cannot be sure what could have been told…so I needed to pay particular attention. I think, for social occasions, even if you miss something, the problem is minor. But when you are in business negotiations, and you miss something, that can have terrible implications.

The stories above repeatedly point out the high costs of making mistakes in business communications. Participants' stories illustrate making mistakes could happen as a result of many different actions such as 'simple mispronunciations of numbers', 'not being careful enough when reading or listening', 'not being persistent enough to ask for clarification', 'misunderstanding', 'misinterpreting' or even 'just leaving something unfinished because of time pressure'. Therefore, not making mistakes is the priority in business communication. In order to fulfil this objective, the people responsible for communicating take significant care not to make mistakes. Some mention unwritten rules shared by colleagues to avoid misunderstandings. Itoh exchanges written confirmations, Kitami pays very detailed attention and ask for clarification or to rephrase sentences, whilst Kaga use follow-up letters to insure they share the same interpretations. This is one of the skills they have to develop as a business person. In the previous chapter (6-3-3), I discussed that 'learning how to repair communication breakdown' is one of the necessary steps BELF users have to go through when they start using English at work. As I have discussed in this part, repairing, or preventing communication breakdown still remains a challenge for participants even though they have become experienced BELF users. The above participants stress the danger of leaving matters 'uncertain' in business. In this regard, the practice of 'let it pass' (Firth, 1996) was not mentioned by any of the participants as an acceptable tactic to use in business communications, although they acknowledged that the approach is useful in social occasions[7].

7-1-5 Lower productivity in BELF

Many participants frequently spoke of challenges regarding speed of work or additional efforts required when performing tasks in English and I coded such stories as 'productivity'. In the previous discussion of 'reading in volume', participants said that they were placed under significant pressure and had to work extremely long hours partly because they could not read as quickly as fellow workers (Chapter 7-1-3). This was brought to attention by Mori, Kaga, Bando and Kitami. Mori says reading in English itself is not that difficult, but that he could have read three times faster if he could read in Japanese. Kitami says that reading in English takes at least twice the time compared to reading in Japanese. The issue of productivity is not limited to reading. In addition, Kitami says that writing in English also takes significantly longer. Yoshimi says that his slow reading in English made him ineffective when he was working in a team of multinational people, and his boss explicitly showed frustration towards him. A few decades later, when he was in an international organisation as part of an operational team handling critical problems caused by international crises, he was required to process his work in English at a hectic speed. He said, 'it took me a long time to develop skills in English to reach the acceptable speed at which fellow international colleagues were handling the work'. Business people often have limited time to process their work, or they have deadlines to meet, and as such, productivity is a critical issue for business people. Unsurprisingly, BELF users are no exception.

In Adachi's story, he says that the required speed of writing in English had a negative impact on his career as a researcher. According to him, he 'could have written five times, or even ten times as many publications', if he wrote in Japanese. Later, when I ask him if he had any

[7] Similarly, Tsuchiya and Handford (2014) recently report that NOT 'let it pass' is a crucial concern of chairperson plays in a business meeting.

situations where he was frustrated because of his English, he raised the issue of productivity again.

Excerpt 32 - Adachi

A: I don't have any particular experience where I failed because of my English, but it took me longer to write and preparing presentations was troublesome. I have always felt it would have been much easier if I had been able to write and present in Japanese.

The issue of productivity is not obvious for researchers to spot compared to other linguistic issues. For instance, if I were analysing authentic writing of Japanese BELF users, I would not notice that they would need to spend longer writing the texts. However, from the user's 'own perspective', productivity is a serious issue and cannot be easily overlooked.

Among the participants, Wakaya is the most eloquent about the issue of productivity, looking at the issue from different perspectives. Wakaya has been working as a consultant to transfer state of art technology abroad. He says reading in English takes five times longer than reading in Japanese (Chapter 7-1-3, Excerpt 26), and that the productivity issue is not limited to reading. Writing in English also takes longer, but, in practice, writing at work is not always a simple task of writing one report.

Excerpt 33 – Wakaya

W: We have to make tender documents in English. We write up documents to the best of our ability in English. Then we make Americans or Britons rewrite them… that way we make the documents as easy as possible to read (in English for clients). Then we submit the proposal, so that we can get better evaluation.

R: If you follow such a method, are your documents as good as any other or are there still some disadvantages?

W: If we prepare tender documents in this way, there are no disadvantages. But going through this process takes time. We may not have competitive disadvantage in content, but this process takes more time and also costs more.

Wakaya first talks about the issue of productivity from the individual user's point of view. He feels that he needs five times more time to read in English than in Japanese. Then he extends his story to his perspective as an executive who oversees the performance of his company. By using native speakers to rewrite their English documents, they can be competitive in an industry where English is considered the norm across the world. However, he stresses that, while the quality of

English documents and presentation can be overcome, the 'costs' of using English still exist; they are simply internalised. The costs are the extra time it takes Japanese staff to write up reports as well as the extra cost of having documents and presentations edited and re-written by native speakers of English.

Excerpt 34 - Wakaya

R: Was it a burden for you to have to conduct your job in English?

W: To a degree. But, as I have become used to using English, it has become less and less of a burden. But writing in English and making reports is still a pretty heavy burden to carry. Writing in English takes over 10 times more time and energy compared to writing in Japanese.

R: How about the quality of your writing?

W: Probably about a tenth of the quality of my written Japanese. It may be deviating from your question, but when we talk about English as an international language from a Japanese perspective, it is a huge disadvantage. We [Japanese people] have to study English don't we? Other competitors, especially native speakers such as the Americans, British, Indians, they are competent straightaway. For instance, even those in Southeast Asia, some of them were brought up in Britain or educated in English, and they are almost native speakers of English. They have no problem writing in English and they have less obstacles to overcome compared to us…I mean we have disadvantages compared to such people.

R: Indeed.

W: For instance, the difference [between native speakers and Japanese people] is comparable to the difference between me writing a report in Japanese and in English. For native speakers, writing a 10 page report takes no time at all. If I'm writing in Japanese, I can do so almost instantaneously, but if I have to write in English, it could easily take up an entire day… but we don't have an option to say no. Yes, we cannot say no….

By saying that he can write a report in Japanese at the same speed as a native speaker writes in English, he presents his confidence as a business person who is no less competent in writing reports compared to native speakers. The only problem is that he has to write in English in his business, and writing English takes '10 times more time and energy' than Japanese. The 'energy' in his original script is '*rouryoku*' and I interpret it as 'mental and physical exhaustion'. Because he says 'energy', I asked further about the 'quality' of his writing in English, and he says lightly '[p]robably about a tenth of the quality' of writing in Japanese. His tone suggested that he believed this to be 'matter of fact'. Then, without explaining his point further, he changed the topic. He thought it was 'deviating from [the researcher's] question', but he still wanted to state his opinion regardless. He says that using 'English as an international language' is 'a huge disadvantage' from a Japanese perspective. He wanted to state the objection to the concept of English as an international language, especially to me, who came from England to interview him about 'English in businesses'. He considers the use of BELF as a disadvantage for the Japanese, but he also clearly states that he has no choice but to accept this disadvantage.

This kind of objection to the concept of 'BELF as a neutral' is also made by other participants. For instance in the previous excerpt, Adachi says (Chapter 7-1-3, Excerpt 32) that 'I have always felt it would have been much easier if I had been able to write and present in Japanese'. He restated this point later in his talk saying that 'we are at a disadvantage, because they [native speakers of English] can write a report as quickly as we write a report in Japanese'. Yoshimi, Naomi, and Itoh also explicitly say that they think English being used as an international language is a disadvantage for them or for the Japanese in general.

Jenkins (2015) points out that 'fairness' is one of the most widely voiced issues by international graduates in her study of Higher Education in the UK. The reasons given by her participants in the field of Higher Education are similar to those of BELF users in this research. The international students feel that it is 'unfair' that they are assessed in an identical manner to students who use English as their first language. In both business and Higher Education, evaluation is supposedly based on 'content quality', yet, because of the disparity in the levels of access to English among ELF users, ideas or concepts by some ELF users' work may not be as well expressed. This is not to say that the level of 'content quality' of these ELF users is inferior to that of stronger ELF users. Rather, the idea of a 'single measure' assessment of 'content quality', expressed in ELF has a fundamental inconsistency, because such evaluation does not take into account unequal access to English and the issue of productivity among ELF users. It also need to pay attention, the issue of productivity cannot be simplified to a comparison between non-native and native speakers of English. While some participants compare the productivity of their own to people they work together, both native and 'more competent' non-native speakers, more often, they compare their productivity in English to their likely productivity in Japanese.

In Chapter 1-3, I put forward my belief that English ought to be considered an imperfect lingua franca, especially because of unequal access to English among people depending on individuals' sociolinguistic background. As such, I argued that the spread of English as lingua franca imposes unequal costs among people with different access to English. In addition, when a company adopts English as a lingua franca for business communication, there is a transfer of cost from the organisation to the individual (Chapter 3-4-3). The above discussion provides a strong argument to these view points, and also illustrates how participants make sense of such situation.

7-1-6 Other issues

I have limited my discussion on challenges in this section to the above five themes because of the limited space. Over ten more challenges were spoken of by participants, of which the most common was taking part in 'small talk'. Many participants also highlighted the difficulty in understanding a wide range of accents when listening even when they felt they had got used to English in general. This has especially been the case when encountering new clients in new locations.

At the end of the discussion of challenges, I have to stress that none of the participants spoke of experiences in business when they clearly failed to achieve their communication goals because of English. Whilst they may face some challenges, or communication breakdowns, they also found means to manage or overcome these challenges. When participants reflect and evaluate on their performance in English through their business career, although they are not totally satisfied, they say that they could achieve assigned tasks/business goals thanks to their efforts to supplement their linguistic limitations. How they could overcome these challenges will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter (Chapter 8) when I focus on changes in English skills over the course of a business career.

7-2 Factors which influence communication

In the previous section, I discussed 'what' challenges participants have struggled to overcome in their business careers and how they negotiate with such challenges. In addition to challenging experiences, many participants talked about experiences of 'success' or 'achievement'. Some felt that using English was not 'that' difficult. Some say that their 'limited English' could be used to communicate in English successfully to achieve their goals. I coded these experiences as a 'success' or 'achievement'. Once these experiences were grouped, each experience was further coded based on different 'reasons/factors', which made their use of English successful. After I started looking at these 'reasons/factors', I realised the experience of 'challenges' also included such 'reasons/factors'. A story about a challenging experience is also a story of overcoming a challenge, and thus includes 'reasons/factors' that explain how the participant could overcome the challenge. Therefore 'reasons/factors' I discuss in this part are analysed from stories of experiences I initially coded not only as 'easy' and 'success' but also from stories of experiences I initially coded as 'challenging'. After examining the 'reasons/factors', four significant factors have emerged. They are, 'simpler English at work', 'perceived value of information', 'sharing a goal' and 'economic relationships'. They are factors which participants felt significantly influenced their business communications in English. In other words, I focus below on 'why' participants perceive some challenges to be easier to overcome while they find other challenges more difficult to deal with. After discussing these four factors, I also explain how these factors are interdependent and influence one another (Chapter 7-2-5), and under what conditions they become influential (Chapter 7-2-6).

7-2-1 Simpler English at work

All participants who work in the field of engineering and researching in natural science repeatedly say the language in the field is relatively simple, and that therefore, using complicated English is unnecessary when attempting to communicate. They believe that this 'simpler' English makes using the language relatively easier. Wakaya's story below is an example to illustrate this point. He talks about Japanese engineers who were sent to work in Cambodia with local engineers.

Excerpt 35 - Wakaya

R: So what is important for them [engineers]?

W: After all, I think they need to speak English in a way that is easy to understand. For instance, Indians often use complex vocabulary, and I don't understand them at all.

R: What do you mean by 'English which is easy to understand'?

W: It is enough if they speak English to the Japanese junior high school level. We do not expect more than that. After all, they do not just study English all the time. Fluency is not needed at all. Engineers know the context… and English is the language to mediate. If you are a civil engineer, then your counterparts are usually civil engineers as well. Since we both know the background well, it's easy to understand each other.

Wakaya perceives that English skills needed for engineering field are simple enough that workers can communicate using the level of English they learn as a senior at school. He believes that this level of English can be reached by simple 'trial and error' of using English at work. Since most engineers have attained a sufficient level of English at school, all that is required is to 'remove the rust from their [school] English' (Chapter 6-3-2, Excerpt 7). He considers such an expectation to be a realistic one that takes into account that engineers are too busy to just 'study English all the time'.

Similarly, as discussed in Chapter 6-4, Kaga says (Excerpt 14) that engineers can establish communication even with a low level of English knowledge because they share the same technical background in their own language, and as such, they can substitute for the lack of oral communication in English through their 'imagination'. Gotoh also says that communicating about machinery is simple and easy, based on his experience of being a trainee engineer at an operation site in Sweden.

Excerpt 36 - Gotoh

R: So at the time, did you communicate with other engineers there? Was it difficult to receive and understand the technical information from them?

G: Basically, if I draw a picture… as we are both engineers, we can understand mutually. I draw a picture, and if I have a question, I just put a question mark on the picture…then, we can communicate, even if we do not know the words. In this sense, so long as we talk about engineering, it was not difficult, because we are playing the same game.

R: Yes,

G: For me, the most difficult thing was general conversation. It is so different and I had no idea [how to communicate].

In the previous excerpt, Kaga (Chapter 6-4, Excerpt 14) says that sharing technical background information makes communication between engineers relatively easy. In this excerpt, Gotoh says that the communication between engineers benefits from everyone 'playing the same game'. Engineers already know the rules of the game in their own language. Therefore, so long as they play the same 'game' in English, it is easy for them to understand each other. However, communication in general life in Sweden was much more difficult, because the rule of communication in a social context would be different and he did not have a clear idea of how to play this alternative 'game'. Gotoh further explains the rule of the 'game' for engineers' communication.

Excerpt 37 - Gotoh

G: Engineers do not use many complex sentences. It is simple. When engineers write sentences, if they are too long, then they are no good. For instance, if you read manuals [in Japanese], they aren't written in long sentences are they? Relatively simple.

R: Indeed,

G: It is because we want to avoid any confusion among users, and so we write the manual in a simple style. It is the same for manuals in English... that is the nature of sentences for engineers. That is, to be clear.

Gotoh confirms that being clear and simple is the rule of playing the 'game', and in engineering communication, this rule is universal in any language. Mori's confirms this point based on his experience when he was sent as a lecturer to an engineering seminar organised by the UN.

Excerpt 38 - Mori

M: Students were from Asia. From Indonesia, Pakistan, Vietnam and so on…

R: I see. How about their English? I mean, did they ask questions? Did they use English well?

M: No problem at all. It is because, when you specialise in the same field, there is no problem using 'broken' English.

Then when I asked about the 'broken' English, he said that his discussions in English with the Asian engineers were not understood by an Australian officer.

Excerpt 39 - Mori

M: It was not because of the English that the Australian officer spoke, but it was because he did not have the specific background and the common interest. [The non-native English speakers] were talking in English, but the officer was the only one who did not understand.

R: Even though he was a native speaker of English?

M: Exactly. In the engineering world, 'broken English' is the standard @@...so I totally disagree with the notion that we need to speak right…speak English in a right way to exchange intentions. I don't think there's any substance behind that claim.

Mori's story sheds light on the topic from an alternative perspective. According to Mori, when engineers who are not native English speakers talk each other, the 'broken' English is used by all engineers without reservation. When I asked what he meant by 'broken' English, he started talking about the Australian officer. It originally appears as if by 'broken' English, he is referring to the kind of English the Australian officer could not understand. Then he said that the lack of engineering knowledge was the reason why the officer did not understand their 'broken English'. Mori laughs, because of the irony. In essence, Mori argued that 'sharing professional knowledge' is critical in order to understand 'broken English' spoken by engineers.

Adachi, a researcher, also says that English in the field of natural sciences is short and simple. He explains that in order to ensure 'what has been discovered' is understood by other scientists, scientists have to use 'simple. English. These sentences need to be 'as short as possible' ensuring that the 'structure is simple' and that 'patterns of expression are routine'. Therefore, even 'if you only know the terminology', 'reading and writing [can be] easy'.

The stories told by engineers and scientists share similar characteristics and perceptions about the users of English. Firstly, they focus on communicating the knowledge of the field without misunderstanding, and in order to do so, simple and short sentences are encouraged and used. Secondly, the specialist terminology of the field is vital in establishing communication. Thirdly, most communications are made among specialists in the same field, and the shared background makes the communication easier. Their shared background knowledge would help them to fill in the gaps of missing information. In this way, engineers with a wide range of English skills from various parts of the world can exchange their knowledge of technology and work together in English. This is exactly the same as reported in the research in the north Europe (e.g. Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010).

Having said that, it is important to mention that some engineers have faced situations when what they perceive as 'limited English skills' are not enough to perform their business needs. Communication among engineers is not limited to technology specific discussion. Gotoh and Shimura's stories demonstrate this point. Gotoh says that the most difficult task he had in Vietnam was to communicate abstract issues in English to local engineers. He needed to improve the standard of cleanness in the work site, but he had little clue on how he could go about communicating in English about such values and ethical issues to people who had different values and ethical standards to him. Mori says that 'small talk' was difficult when he lectured to engineers. He says that it was not difficult to give lectures to teach new technology to engineers from Asian countries. However, because one lesson was as long as 90 minutes, he wanted to say some jokes and to add 'small talk', but it was much more difficult than talking about the technology.

Furthermore, Daiwa who works for *Shosha* and has worked as an intermediator between manufacturers from Japan and abroad raises his concern that engineers may not be fully understanding what their counterparts want to say.

Excerpt 40 - Daiwa

R: Are technical terms in English and technical terms in Japanese very different?

D: No, [because Japanese technical terms are often loan words] we can understand most of them in Japanese *Katakana*. We can tell.

R: So, for instance, do engineers of Japanese manufactures understand conversations in English, even if they are not necessary good at English?

D: People say so, but I have wondered how well they understand these conversation @@. These people only understand the technical terms, but they are not able to keep up with other normal conversations…

R: Do you mean that they can communicate at work, but not out of work?

D: I mean that they understand such [technical] discussions through technical terms, but they do not understand other parts…they don't understand if it is Yes or No… they don't understand the flow of the communication... so, they may misunderstand…

The stories discussed above all suggest that technology focused communication among engineers may be established with what they call 'minimum skills of English', but such skills may not be sufficient to cover all of their business needs.

At the end of this section I need to discuss whether this rule of 'simpler English' is applicable for use of BELF, outside of engineering and scientific fields. Some participants tell similar stories of how it is not difficult to communicate in English at work. Momo, who works in the hospitality industry, says that the minimum level of English in operational work is very basic.

Excerpt 41 - Momo

M: When you need to tell someone that a toilet is out of order, you could say in a complete sentence or, only in two words… it doesn't matter. All you need to do is to show that the toilet needs to be fixed. I believe that is the level. If you are educated properly in the Japanese education system, it is not a high level.

She says that the minimum required level of English for those who work in her industry is very low, and that 'it doesn't matter' how English is used so long as the job is done. However, in her previous story (Chapter 7-1-4, Excerpt 29), she says that she did not force herself to use English and used a top-level interpreter when she communicated for Investor Relations. This would suggest that she believes some work (e.g. operations) needs a low level of English while some work (e.g. IR) requires a level of English that matches that of 'top level interpreters'. In her mind, the level of English required at work varies depending on the responsibilities that need to be fulfilled and the goals that need to be achieved.

Some other participants say that their use of English is simple, but some say simple English is not enough for their work. Therefore, from the participants' stories in this study, I can only say that the rule of simple English seems to be shared and accepted widely among engineers and scientists, but acceptance of this rule of simple English cannot be directly translated to other business and sectors in general. I will come back to this point in the next chapter when I discuss how participants' English skills change over their business career and how they makes sense of them (Chapter 8-3).

7-2-2 Perceived value of information

Many participants who are in engineering and scientific fields say that if their technical information is superior, the listeners become more eager to understand their messages. Therefore, it becomes easier for them to communicate in English even if their English skillset is relatively limited. Adachi's story is very clear in this point.

Excerpt 42 - Adachi

A: English is very simple for researchers. There are no such things as patterns. At any rate, make sentences short, a subject and a verb…don't use complicated structures…what is more important is to speak of something significant and previously unknown about nature…if you discover something before Westerners, before Asians, and if you write about it, even if your English is not that good, everyone will be desperate to read your writings.

Adachi's comment suggests that despite an attempt to use simple and clear English, some English users with limited linguistic skills may still produce speaking/writing which is not easy to understand. However, if the content of the communication, such as quality of scientific knowledge is appreciated by readers, then they will be willing to read even if the English is difficult to understand. In short, the quality of information motivates interlocutors. Superiority of information was also mentioned in stories told by Kaga (Chapter 6-4, Excerpt 14) and Mori (Chapter 7-2-1, Excerpt 38&39). These participants are mainly working to transfer superior technology developed in Japan to those who want to learn and apply the knowledge into their local sites, often in developing countries. Both 'teacher' (typically Japanese) and 'learner' (typically engineers in developing countries) may have limited English skills, but they can establish communication because the superiority of technical information held by the Japanese motivates 'learners' to communicate. The situation seems to be similar to Sunaoshi's research (2005) in the US which showed that the technical superiority of 'the Japanese workers is seen as power over the American workers'. As a result, the American workers were found to be 'concentrated on listening to what the Japanese were trying to say'. Bando's story also demonstrates how an individual can communicate using relatively limited English as long as his/her point is highly appreciated.

Excerpt 43 - Bando

B: When I was in Chicago, I was working in an English only environment, even though I was still not good at English. What happened was that when I said something, people around me, such as superiors or bosses said like, 'listen and pay attention, he does not speak good English and his English is poor, but he always says something important'. So when I said 'there are some mistakes here [in our document]', people were shocked, yet they considered my thoughts, and then often agreed with my arguments…

R: I see

B: This is how we need to build up our reputation. It's not English. But if [people around you] start to feel that you are saying something important, although your English is difficult to understand, then [you can manage]…. English becomes less important, I think.

His message confirms that the value of the content of the message is far more important than how the content is communicated in English. The 'value' of content can vary widely. In the technical field, the value would be the superiority of technology or scientific knowledge. In other business fields, it could be 'valuable information' for the business.

7-2-3 Sharing a goal

In addition to the superiority of information, sharing a goal among interlocutors seems to be a factor which influences their communication. For instance as discussed in Chapter 6-3-5, Gotoh says that when he stayed in Sweden for one year as a trainee, he did not face many difficulties in spite of his very limited English skills. Gotoh describes his experience in Sweden, where 'everybody was kind to [him]' when he joined their team of engineers to learn and bring back the technology his company had purchased. Gotoh and the engineers in Sweden shared the common goal of successful transferring technology to Japan, and as such they were cooperative. Gotoh picks out the impact of sharing goals in another of his stories when he was stationed in Vietnam to run a project jointly with Britons, Americans, Singaporeans and himself.

Excerpt 44 - Gotoh:

G: The balance of English was interesting. For instance, from time to time, I could not understand what the Scot said, although two others understood.

R: So what did you do?

G: I asked him to repeat, and the Scot said 'sorry I am not good at English', as a joke, and then he repeated his point again in very easy-to-understand English.

R: So your regular meetings were only with native speakers of English. Did you have any problem, feel something was difficult?

G: Hmm… no. I always asked them whenever I didn't understand…like 'please teach me'.

R: In that meeting, did you have any conflicts?

G: No, it was not like that. It was, everybody helping each other to move forward in the project...it was a partnership…It was a partnership to do something together…

R: So you were in a team of four?

G: Yes, yes, it was a team. We worked together, supported each other…

Gotoh, whose English skills were still relatively limited at the time, worked as a member of the operation management team with three native English speakers in Vietnam. His relationship with the other three was cooperative to the point where he could ask them to teach him frankly, whenever he did not understand. His tone shows that he enjoyed the friendly relationship with them. In this particular situation, he was comfortable working in a 'native speaker only' team because the group shared a team goal and established collaborative relationships amongst one another.

When a goal of the business is not shared or if they have conflicting interests, communication may become difficult. For instance, Daiwa tells a story of when he faced a conflict of interest in negotiations.

Excerpt 45 - Daiwa

D: I had a troubling project in India and I had to visit the site almost once every month. The project had been on hold for a while, and I needed to resume the project. We needed to decide how we could finance the project. In addition, the Japanese manufacturers had a huge amount of inventory, and we had to negotiate the client to pay for the inventory.

R: I see…

D: We needed to ask them to pay, but they did not have money. So what could we do? Eventually, our company managed to finance the project, but we needed to negotiate the contract terms. The negotiations were terribly tough.

R: I see…

D: I really had a tough time communicating in English. They put forward their points eloquently, and it was difficult for me to understand what they were saying in English, let alone what they were thinking and the logic behind it. Such negotiations are hated by everybody, and I certainly didn't enjoy it. My English level was not good enough to negotiate in such tough conditions, and we hired an American lawyer to assist me.

Daiwa found that negotiating when there is a conflict of interest poses a tough challenge, and he says that his level of English was not sufficient to perform such a difficult task. I had an impression that Daiwa sensed Indian clients used their higher linguistic skills in English rather deliberately – using difficult words and speaking quickly without considering his relatively lower level of English–to make the negotiations difficult for Daiwa. Because he felt this situation was risky for him and his company, he hired an American lawyer, rather than negotiating everything by himself. The story demonstrates how in situations when there are serious conflicts of interest, communication can become very tough and uncooperative. Kankaanranta and Planken argue that BELF users usually share their objective of business goals, and such shared goals motivate them to be cooperative to negotiate meaning and accommodate their language (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010). The stories in this study confirm that sharing a goal motivates cooperation in communication, but such a situation does not always occur. BELF communication can be tough and uncooperative if interlocutors have conflicting interests. Daiwa's situation is very similar to the comment that German managers made in a study by Ehrenreich (2010). They argued that in situations of conflict, some native speakers use more sophisticated English and as such, that they have to use the language skilfully, or otherwise find themselves at a considerable disadvantage. Kitami provides further support to this point when he speaks about his observation of English used in business contexts.

Excerpt 46 - Kitami

R: In business, do you think it is important to have good English skills for negotiating? Do you think it makes a difference…?

K: I think when everything goes well, or when you have advantages, when you are buyers, or have products with technical advantages, or if you are working together to achieve a common goal, it is fine...but when you are in trouble…it is different. Actually, I was called a trouble shooter.

R: Yes

K: In troubling situations, you have to have punch in your English, and use English that demands respect…

R: Respect…?

K: If you cook up problems, interlocutors will feel that you are not being sincere…We need to be sincere, we need to win respect, and it is difficult if we are short of words. You need to be able to use English, you need to be able to say what you want to say, you need to have a range of vocabulary and expressions…not only in Western countries, but also in Asia, and in the Middle East… We (Japanese people) tend to say we can understand without words, we often say that you should read people…but outside of Japan, if you want to negotiate, you have to express everything in words, not necessarily with difficult words, but still, it is important to put forward what needs to be said…

He thinks that when 'everything goes well', the English skills required are not necessarily of a high level, but if 'something goes wrong' or if one is in a weaker position, the level of English matters. He sees himself as a valuable BELF user for his company as a 'trouble shooter', because his high level of English enabled him to contribute to his firm in tough situations, which not everybody could probably handle.

BELF researchers such as Kankaanranta also stress the importance of personal relationships. In Kankaanranta and Planken's discussion (2010), personal relationship is pointed out as one of the three essential parts of BELF competence (discussion Chapter 3-2-4). In this study, I am not able to provide data to specifically support this point because stories of developing cooperative and favourable personal relationships always referred to situations when participants shared a goal with the interlocutors. Therefore, it is not clear what impact favourable relationships can have in situations where there is no common goal.

7-2-4 Economic relationships

Business communication is always situated in the business environment, and hence, economic relationships are repeatedly used to explain why communicating in English can become easier or more difficult. In business communications, interlocutors are influenced by multiple layers of economic factors such as the nature of the organisation, the position of the organisation and the communication goals.

7-2-4-1 Seller-buyer relationship

One of the most explicitly told economic relationships that have a direct impact on communication, was the seller-buyer relationship. Many participants recall experiences of their communication in English either as a seller or as a buyer, and how such relationships influenced how they used the language.

Momo, who was in the buyer's department, reflects on how she used English.

Excerpt 47 - Momo

M: Because I was a buyer representing my company, and I buy only if I understand their service, they [Europeans] tried very hard to explain their products in a way that was easy for me to understand. It was good at the time. But if I ask myself if I could sell our service at the time… my English was not at that level…. I don't think my English was at the level needed to work for the seller division.

R: Just now you said it may be more difficult if you are a seller. Why?

M: Because if I (the buyers) don't understand what is being said, I (the buyers) just don't buy…that's it. They (the sellers) have to put in a lot of effort to make me buy. If I were a seller instead, they would not buy from me if they didn't understand what I was saying in English. It means that your English needs to be persuasive if you are a seller.

Momo firmly confirms from her experience that the seller-buyer relationship is explicit to interlocutors, and that the achievement of sellers' communication goals is almost exclusively decided by the buyer. Therefore sellers have to accommodate to buyers, and not vice versa. The impact of the seller-buyer relationship has been mentioned by many participants. Daiwa also confirms that the seller-buyer power relationship has an impact on communication, by comparing his experience both in exporting and importing sections during his time in a *Shosha*.

Excerpt 48 – Daiwa

D: It is always difficult to meet managers in the buying department (compared to managers in the sales department). If senior managers in the buying department say that he only has 30 minutes, then that's all we have to sell our idea. I feel a lot of time pressure. This kind of situation happens frequently when Japanese manufacturers sell their products abroad.

R: I see. Is it different if you are on the buying side?

D: Let me see… I was once in the importing section. Sellers including Americans often came to Japan to sell. I took the American to visit Japanese clients, in order to assist Americans to sell. They would explain repeatedly in easy-to-understand English, if the Japanese buyers didn't understand. This is what happens when you are importing.

Daiwa first illustrates that buyers have the power when it comes to deciding how meetings are set up. Then he says that Japanese manufactures are often on the selling side, and so they have to adjust their communication according to the expectations of the buying side. Daiwa specifically mentions American sellers accommodating their English communication for Japanese buyers, as an example of the strong power that buyers have over sellers. That American business people actively adjusted their English to the level of the Japanese buyers impressed Daiwa, a veteran in international business. Their approach was in stark contrast to the conventional perception that Americans tend to exercise a 'domineering' attitude. In the engineering field, Wakaya also confirms that when his company sells technology abroad, they have to prepare thoroughly to demonstrate the superiority of their technology. However, when he purchases technology from abroad, it is much easier for him because sellers must persuade him of the superiority of their technology. In the field of business management, the buyer-seller relationship has been identified as a source of power by researchers, such as in the case of language choice in Europe (Lavric & Bäck, 2009). This phenomenon is confirmed by the power relationships clearly visible in the stories told by Japanese participants[8].

[8] I am not claiming that the buyer 'always' has power over the seller. Whilst none of the participants mentioned such a case, in a monopoly or oligopoly market, the seller often have economic power over the buyer, and the communication dynamics would differ significantly.

7-2-4-2 Other economic relationships

Analysis of participants' stories suggest that other broader aspects of economics related relationships, which I will group together as 'other economic relationships' also influence communication between interlocutors. Examples of such factors include the level of investment and the volume of trade.

Daiwa says that large Japanese manufacturers such as Toyota or Nissan have strong economic power in business all over the world, and this power impacts their employees' communications abroad. These companies are usually welcomed in any country as potential investors, buyers, and business partners. Based on his experience working in a *Shosha* where he met and spoke to many Japanese business people abroad, he says that he is often impressed by managers of large manufacturing firms. They often operate huge projects, despite not having 'outstanding competence of English'. He thinks that their business communication in English is, to some extent, helped by the economic power of their companies.

The story of Itoh (Chapter 7-1-1, Excerpt 23) also supports the idea of economic power influencing communication in meetings. He says that he proposed changes to the rule of meetings British and Americans who dominated the meeting. However, he also admitted that his proposals had some impact, since his firm had a significant enough share in the project for his opinions to be worth listening to. He says that 'the power balance of the meeting should be determined by the portion of voting rights, not how well they can speak English. The portion of voting rights should be determined by the portion of ownership. His voice was heard within the meeting to an extent, because he represented a company which had economic power in the project.

Momo also made a point about how the choice of language is also influenced by economic power. She says that in the past few decades in the Japanese hospitality industry, the language of business has been shifting from Japanese to English. They used to take 'use of Japanese' in their communication for granted, especially in Asian countries, because Japan has a large customer base, and they have a high propensity to spend. She says 'if they want a share of the Japanese market, then they have to speak in Japanese. This is a supply and demand relationship'. But she also continues that, as the size of Chinese business activities exceed that of the Japanese, less people speak Japanese even in Asia in her industry, and thus, more Japanese people are required to communicate in English. It is not possible to generalise her personal observation, and I am unable to provide any study to support her. However, if less people use Japanese in Asian countries because of Japan's declining economic presence in Asia, then the implications may mean that more Japanese people need to use BELF to do business in Asia in coming years.

7-2-5 Power relationships in communication

In studies of English users at work, it is repeatedly confirmed that language functions as a power-wielding instrument (Charles, 2007, disucssion in Chapter 3-4-2-6), and language skills can empower/dis-empower users in business communication (Charles, 2009; Marschan-Piekkari et al., 2004; 1999). In this study, English skills are confirmed as one of the factors which influence business communication significantly but the power of language is told in a complex manner. As discussed above, most of the participants consider themselves to have some limitations when communicating in English rather than in Japanese. Therefore, many participants feel that they have less power when they communicate in English with people, who they perceive to be stronger English users, including both native and non-native users. At the same time, I have discussed how several other factors, such as superiority of information (Chapter 7-2-2), sharing and not sharing goals (Chapter 7-2-3) and economic power (Chapter 7-2-4) can also influence communication in English. When these stories are studied closely along with the context in which they are situated, it is clear that the combined influence of such factors cannot be simple. These different factors are not mutually exclusive, but interact with each other, and work in a complex and different manner depending on the situation and context.
Bando's story clearly indicates that this is the case.

Excerpt 49 - Bando

B: I am talking about selling our service to Americans. If I want to sell our service, I have to have better English. But if THEY are trying to sell to me, I would say "accommodate to my level of English".

The tone in which he spoke about communication with American counterparts, makes it seem as if it is a matter of fact that economic factors outweigh and override language factors. In this respect, his story shares similarities with Daiwa's (Chapter 7-2-4-1, Excerpt 48). Meanwhile, Adachi's story (Chapter 7-2-2, Excerpt 42) shows his perception that, if his scientific knowledge is valuable to other scientists, then even if his English is not that good, other scientists would be desperate to read his work. In this case, the power of superior information 'cancels out' any negative influence due to his linguistic limitations. From these stories, it is clear that communication in English is not only governed by the power of language, but also by other factors. Therefore I would like to stress that in business communication, the power of language should be discussed within the context, and that consideration must be given to other factors such as economic power, superiority of information, and sharing goals.

7-2-6 Changes in the power relationship and earning 'respect'

Influential factors work based on the perception of interlocutors, and thus, until a certain power or superiority is recognised by others, it does not influence relationships and their communications. Yoshimi's story clearly shows that when his colleagues acknowledged his economic power, this had an impact on interlocutors and his perceived difficulty of communicating in English. Yoshimi first had a hard time working as a junior staff with multinational colleagues because his English was not sufficient to handle routine communications.

Excerpt 50 -Yoshimi

Y: When I started my work [in an international organisation], I was given a thick pile of documents. I was required to read them as quickly as I would have been able to in Japanese. But my speed of reading in English was so slow that I could not function properly in the organisation.

R: Oh…

Y: Because I was so slow, I inevitably needed to do overtime work. Then, my boss said I must be stupid. "How do you need one whole week just to read this book", he said. "You must be stupid"…Literally, he called me stupid.

R: Did he really think that, or was he being mean to you?

Y: Of course, he said so it to be mean to me. He knew that as a Japanese, I wasn't that good at English, and so he tried to offend me.

However, there was a significant turning point when he negotiated with a Japanese colleague to bring in an investment of $50M to the organisation he was working.

Excerpt 51 - Yoshimi

Y: When my bosses heard the news, their manner towards me changed completely…@

R: Oh, of course@

Y: @@ 'He can do the job, he can bring $50M of money', that's how they recognised me. I think this was it @@@. This was the moment when my colleagues changed their attitude…and became kinder towards me…

Out of the over 30 participants, Yoshimi was one of only two who spoke of explicit criticism regarding their poor English, from colleagues who were also non-native speakers. In the first part of his story, Yoshimi did not have any factors which could cancel out his 'poor English'. He had neither the personal relationships nor the economic power to make up for his 'poor English', and as a new junior staff, was probably seen as someone who could contribute little to the business. As a result, he faced criticism from his boss for his level of English. The other participant who was accused of poor English skills is Naomi, who worked in a Hong Kong based company as a junior staff. She also did not have any of the factors mentioned above to facilitate her English communication, and received a complaint face-to-face about how her poor English was disrupting the rest of the team's work by a Malaysian colleague. These two stories illustrate that if BELF users lack any factor which could 'cancel-out' their relatively weak English ability, they may be exposed to the unequal power of language, and therefore experience more difficulties in working in an English speaking environment.

The second part of Yoshimi's story is about winning the 'respect' of interlocutors, who recognised him as an economic contributor to the organisation. Once his economic power was recognised by his colleagues, he felt that communication in English became much easier because the attitudes of his colleagues changed. In the previous section, Bando (Chapter 7-2-2, Excerpt 43) said he could work in Chicago even though his English was poor, because his boss appreciated his opinion. He demonstrates that the power of information in a speech content can impact how a BELF user is looked at by fellow workers. Furthermore, he says that earning 'respect' from his colleagues to be an effective strategy he had used intentionally to negotiate in his communication, especially when he did not have particularly strong English skills.

In this part, I have discussed several factors which may influence perceived difficulties in communication among business people. Economic power, superiority of information and sharing a goal along with power of language are among the influential factors, which are not mutually exclusive, exhaustive or static. These powers/abilities need to be perceived by interlocutors to be influential. BELF users participating in this study are often situated in a position of relatively limited language power. Therefore, gaining recognition among interlocutors through other factors is highly valuable for BELF users when they are communicating in English.

7-3 Bridging two environments

Lastly in this chapter, I would like to discuss participants' stories of using English and Japanese interactively in their business communications, and how they perceive such usages as challenges for them. ELF researchers have provided evidence that ELF is used along with other languages, and hybridity is identified as one of the key characteristics of EFL users (Jenkins et al., 2011). (more detailed discussion in Chapter 3-2-2-7). The discussion in this section is related to hybridity, but provides an alternative perspective by looking at how languages interact. I first discuss how Japanese participants speak almost exclusively in Japanese with other Japanese people. Consequently, Japanese BELF users have to use both English and Japanese interactively to perform their business tasks, thus, they have to shift between two language environments frequently.

7-3-1 Use of Japanese language

All but one of the participants confirmed that they speak almost exclusively in Japanese when they speak with other Japanese people. When Ryoko was working for a MNC, her colleagues decided to run a trial of English communication only even between Japanese colleagues. However, this did not last for long.

Excerpt 52 - Ryoko

Ry: One day, we decided [in our office] that we should all speak in English [even between Japanese people], although it did not last long.
Re: Oh?
Ry: We were significantly slower communicating in English, compared to Japanese. @@
Re: @@@
Ry: We also realised that we don't like listening to each other's clumsy English @@... @@
Re: @@
Ry: @@@

The laugh within this conversation occurred, because of the shared feeling that speaking in English among Japanese people is, indeed, clumsy and maybe even funny or awkward. This conversation shows our mutual feeling that speaking in English with other Japanese people is emotionally uncomfortable for Japanese people in general, including myself.

Gotoh also explains why Japanese people speak only in Japanese with other Japanese people, from a more business oriented view point. Since he mentioned that he always has wrap-up meetings with Japanese colleagues after teleconferences in English with Mexican and Vietnamese clients, I asked if he had ever spoken in English during these meetings.

Excerpt 53 - Gotoh

G: No, we don't use English with Japanese people. We use English with Japanese people only when a non-Japanese person joins. This is because our goal is not to communicate in English, but to do business.

R: So you're saying that you do [business] better if you use Japanese?

G: Of course, it [communication in Japanese] presents fewer problems. You don't have to think like… "What is the meaning of this word?" "What does it really mean?"… you don't have to think through things like that in your mind.

R: So, it's more difficult in English…?

G: Yes, especially interpretation. Often, what they intend to mean in English differs from what we interpret them saying, and vice versa. So we have to take great care in interpreting correctly, through asking ourselves questions such as "does he really mean this?", "to what extent does he mean this?" or "does he understand my point?". This is crucial. And to confirm that our and their interpretations are accurate, we always send minutes of the wrap-up to our clients. Otherwise, the [foreign] clients assume that we have agreed on what they meant/interpreted, and this can be a real issue.

Gotoh points out that detailed nuances of 'what they hear in English' needs to be 'interpreted' and agreed among the Japanese business workers in the Japanese language, despite the fact that the minutes of the meeting are in English. He is aware that the same English communication could be interpreted differently among the Japanese, Mexicans, and the Vietnamese. Therefore, he needs to send over a Japanese version of the interpretation to counterparts to prevent any discrepancy in understanding. As a result, he feels that English conversation involves more uncertainties and dilutes details, so it is not sufficient or appropriate among Japanese staff to use English for critical discussions, when they have a much better, more reliable alternative in the form of Japanese. Other participants repeatedly dismiss the idea of speaking English with other Japanese people, except for Fumie, who considers speaking in English with her Japanese subordinates as being beneficial for their English skill training.

This means that if a business person works for a Japanese organisation or a Japanese dominant organisation, all of the critical discussions within the organisation among Japanese, such as business plans and strategies, as well as all of the detailed exchanges about their overseas businesses, are made in Japanese. Even if participants work for a non-Japanese company, they discuss in Japanese with their Japanese colleagues, clients and partners.

7-3-2 Shifts between English and Japanese

The discussion in the previous section showed that in order to achieve their business goals, Japanese BELF users have to bridge between 'what they discuss in Japanese with Japanese people' and 'what they discuss in English with non-Japanese people'. Wakaya's story of how his team work together to produce a document in English is an example of such a process. His company sells technology to abroad, usually through international tenders. This means that tender documents and presentations in English are the most critical communication tools to sell their technology. He explains how such workers in the firm prepare for these important communications. To begin with, preparations, which include the discussion of strategies, deciding specifications, making tender documents, and developing presentations are conducted in Japanese by Japanese engineers. It is only after all these steps have been fulfilled that English comes to the fore.

Excerpt 54 - Wakaya

R: So, when do you change the contents of your discussion into English?

W: We use Japanese until we make the final presentation and materials. Once that is done, we translate them into English.

R: So you mean that first, you make a Japanese version of the presentation?

W: Yes, I have never heard of making an English presentation from the start…First, we have to discuss [in Japanese] during the process of making [a Japanese version].

R: Then, you get internal approval on the Japanese version?

W: Indeed, are you surprised@@?? Then, we outsource it for translation into English. After outsourcing, we have to check the technical terms to ensure that the contents of the presentation are the same as what we discussed in Japanese. Then, one of us gives the presentation in English.

R: So you mean that the presenter has to change what he had discussed and understood in Japanese into English to give a presentation?

W: Yes.

R: In what language does he come up with tactics for the presentation?

W: Japanese probably.

R: So all the contents are made in Japanese @@…

W: Yes, and we disguise it as English @@.

R: But if you prepare this way, the presenter may find it difficult to answer questions on the spot [in English], surely?

W: Yes that is true. That's why senior executives bring many staff.

Wakaya's story illustrates that English presentations given by his colleagues are actually all prepared in Japanese until the last minute, and the translation to English is outsourced. It is noticeable that his firm's internal approval is made based on their documents in Japanese, and works on the assumption that when translated into English, the documents and presentation would convey the same message and have the same content. The BELF users working on the project are responsible for the accuracy of the English version. This places his team at a 'critical point' which connects the Japanese environment where Japanese colleagues communicate in Japanese based on Japanese business practices, with the English environment where they communicate with non-Japanese clients in English based on non-Japanese business practices. It is the presenter and his team's responsibility to guarantee that the two environments are connected effectively. Furthermore, if the company wins the tender and if they implement the project, the team has to bridge the two environments frequently, that is, every time communication between the two parties is required. In other words, in order to undertake business, Japanese BELF users have to shift between the Japanese environment and the English environment frequently.

In the following extract, Kaga explains the difficulty of 'crossing the border of the two languages' from his perspective. In this story, Kaga is talking about how he prepares his agenda for meetings with partners abroad.

Excerpt 55 - Kaga

R: I think you can't decide everything you discuss with your client. You have to receive consensus within your company, don't you?

A: Correct. We discuss within our firm to develop a consensus. That is all in Japanese.

R: So, all the discussions are in Japanese, and everything there is in English, so your role is to bridge the two languages, right? Don't you find that logic here among Japanese people is not necessarily the same as the logic there in English…?

A: Different, completely different…Completely may be going too far, but I think they are very different. The differences arise in what we think is important. It's difficult to explain this. From the Japanese company's perspective, we have particular points which we consider important. Sometimes, from their [overseas clients] viewpoint, it does not make much sense. They don't understand why that part is important. It happens.

R: It happens…

A: That is why it is extremely difficult to pick up something particularly important for them, and to give a presentation that reflects this. I often face this difficulty.

Kaga tells that bridging between what he communicates with Japanese in the Japanese language and what he communicates with his overseas clients in English is 'extremely difficult'. He has to bridge not only the language, but a variety of other aspects which differ, including the corporate culture, business interests, expectations, and values. He explains his point further to emphasise just how complex such a task can be.

Excerpt 56 - Kaga

A: We make documents which are written in a hundred percent Japanese which were constructed from discussions which were one hundred percent Japanese...

R: Then?

A: I translate them @@

R: All by yourself @@ ?

A: I have no other option. @@ Of course, it is not a direct translation, not word for word… that would not make sense. So, this is the dilemma. When I change translate sentence from Japanese to English, when I cross the border of the two languages…I feel unsure as to whether I ought to include all of the intended messages, or drop some of them, or add something…But I have no other option, so I make the decision myself…

R: So nobody can check with you and say it is fine?

A: No, we don't have anybody who can do that.

R: So you do it all alone?

A: It is all my responsibility.

R: That's a really difficult job.

A: Yes, this is the biggest dilemma I face in my job.

Much like Wakaya, Kaga is in a 'critical point' which connects the two different environments of Japanese and English. However, in contrast to Wakaya who work as part of a team, Kaga is alone. Kaga has no one to discuss with on how to bridge the two environments and he cannot receive feedback or advice on his work. His bosses only know the Japanese side of the project and they approve his plan based on the documentation in Japanese. He is fully responsible how the Japanese plan is to be communicated to (and may be executed with) his overseas client in English. His company is a large domestic technology firm, and international business forms only a small part of his company's business. As a result, very few employees in the firm have skills comparable to Kaga's. Nevertheless, given the complexity of the project in question, the challenge of bridging the Japanese and English environment must be substantial.

Like Kaga, many participants say that 'bridging' the Japanese environment and English environment is difficult because this process is not simply a 'translation'. Gotoh mentions how the order and style of communication is different between Japanese and English.

Excerpt 57 - Gotoh

G: I needed to be cautious. The letter was not addressed to my counterpart, but rather, from my top boss to the top boss of the company we were working with. To start with, the general manager would talk to me about the source of the complaint, and I would make a draft in Japanese of my interpretation of what needed to be said. That was shown to the senior executive… After we received feedback from the executive, I changed it to English. Then, I needed to change the order as well…

R: What do you mean?

G: Like…I needed to change the order…In a Japanese business letter style, we speak in a 'roundabout' way. We first say greetings, appreciations, then, we list reasons and excuses, and then we say what we want to ask them to do at the end.

R: Okay.

G: In English, you have to say it differently. You have to be direct from the very beginning… right? So I needed to change the order completely.

Because it is a letter of complaint from his senior manager to a client's senior manager, Gotoh had to be very cautious when attempting to bridge the Japanese and English environments. The draft in Japanese is developed attentively, and then he translates the draft into English. However, he then has to deconstruct the message and add nuances and change the order of what is being said in English so that the English message is an accurate representation of what his senior manager would want to say. Whilst such a process appears highly unproductive, as an experienced Japanese BELF user, Gotoh knows that a simple translation does not suffice. 'Tips' given on how best to translate Japanese writing into English writing varied from participant to participant. Itoh says he always considers adding detailed explanations about the background behind the decisions made by the Japanese head office, so that partners overseas can understand the message better. Kitami says that when he worked in offices in Indonesia and India, he tried to convey core 'messages' rather than translating sentences directly. Mori thinks that 'Japanese logic' and 'English logic' are different, and when he writes in English, he first simulates in his mind how the logic in Japanese should be changed into the logic in English. It is only after conducting such a lengthy simulation in his mind, that he can finally start writing documents in English about technologies developed in Japan. He believes that such a process is needed because all the knowledge about the technologies he needs to write about is stored in his mind in Japanese logic. Erika's idea of effective translation is 'simpler'.

Excerpt 58 - Erika

E: When I write complicated English emails, if I write in the same way as I write in Japanese, it is very difficult. Instead, I make the contents simple, and make those simple sentences into English. I write an English e-mail as a composition of simple sentences, so that they can understand.'

Erika's system seems to be rather simple, however, some participants say that the bridging skills often require more complex considerations about business implications. Kaga (Chapter 7-3-2, Excerpt 56) has already made this point but Itoh and Jinbou also stress the same point. For instance when Itoh receives proposals from clients in English, he needs to critically review what implications such a proposal could have for his colleagues in Japan. He considers how these proposals will be accepted by the Japanese side, what impacts it would have on the Japanese plan, and what risks the Japanese side should bear in mind. When he translates these English proposals into Japanese, he needs to reflect upon these considerations and write a Japanese document making these issues explicit to Japanese readers.

In summary in this part, I discussed three points about the use of English and Japanese. Firstly, the need, as told by all of the participants and probably applicable for most Japanese BELF users, to use English and Japanese interactively in order to conduct business effectively in English. Secondly, I showed how participants are situated in a point where they have to bridge the Japanese and English environment. Some participants say that they are often solely responsible for this bridging. They have to insure that what they discussed in Japanese is appropriately communicated in English to their clients, and vice versa. Finally, I demonstrated that the 'transition' between English and Japanese is not a simple translation. Complex issues are involved within the process, and participants often developed their own ways of ensuring that bridging between the two environments could be done as accurately and effectively as possible.

Conclusion

In Chapter 7, I have revealed how BELF users negotiate their use of English, by discussing the challenges they face, factors which influence the communication, and skills to bridge the environment of English and Japanese. During the discussion, I have also shown that the need for and the challenges of using English vary widely among Japanese people, and that they develop their BELF communication skills according to their needs. I discussed several factors which impact participants' perceived difficulty of communication. These include economic power, superiority of information and sharing a goal. As one of the key characteristics of Japanese BELF users, I discussed their need to bridge between English communication and Japanese communication frequently. Participants' complex and sophisticated skills to handle this process may be one of the critical characteristics which most Japanese BELF users have to develop. In the following chapter, I will continue the discussion, by focusing on the trajectory of Japanese BELF users.

Chapter 8: Trajectory of Japanese BELF users

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the overall trajectory of participants as BELF users, and also look at how the participants' sense making changes and develops over the course of their trajectories. In chapter 6, I reviewed experiences in the initial stages of the participants' careers, whilst chapter 7 focused on the latter stages. In both these chapters, I analysed challenging experiences as individual events situated in their business contexts. In this chapter I provide an alternative approach by looking at a chain of experiences together rather than by breaking stories down into individual experiences. This approach aims to reveal the links and connections between experiences from the participant's viewpoint (Riessman, 2008: 20) based on their internal sense making. By using this approach, it becomes possible to gain an insight into the shape of participants' overall trajectories at the point of interview.

The thematic analysis of participants' experiences in chapters 6 and 7 revealed some common characteristics. For this chapter, I read through the transcripts of the participants' trajectory as one, and then highlight and comment on the links between experiences. I also cross-examined characteristics of these links, adding new codes into the existing codes I developed for chapters 6 and 7. Consequently, I discuss three main themes in this chapter. Firstly, I discuss how participants believe that their use of English has changed over the duration of their careers, as a result of the new challenges they have faced (Chapter 8-1). Secondly, I discuss how they react to these new challenges and consider how they believe they have acquired the necessary English skills to meet these challenges (Chapter 8-2). Finally, I discuss how participants make sense of their skills of English, position English skills within their career development, and have developed and/or compromised with their skills of English throughout their trajectory (Chapter 8-3).

8-1 Changes in English use over time

When I examined changes of participants' use of English over the course of their trajectories, I realised that they are influenced by two different types of factors, namely environmental factors and individual factors. Environmental factors are changes which participants have observed in their environment, such as in the business/professional world and in their organisation. Another type of factors are related with changes in a participant's career path. This may include cases such as becoming a manager, being assigned a different type of job or working at a different location. In this study, the focus is placed on the individual factors, but I begin by briefly discussing changes in environmental factors so that a macro picture of the participants' contexts can be built up.

8-1-1 Changes in environmental factors

Participants in this study speak of changes in the use of English in the business environment, often as a background to their experiences. Adachi has a clear perception that the use of English in his research community has changed drastically in the past three decades, and in particular, that the English used has become far more pragmatic. He tells detailed stories of how he and his professor spent hours trying to write their documents in 'standard' English 30 years ago, whereas nowadays, he feels that most researchers, including himself, believe that simple and practical English is good enough. Itoh and Kitami also say that the use of English in their business community has become more pragmatic and flexible, as people pay less attention to how/if they use grammatically correct English. Another change, as told by many participants, is the increasing number of business people, especially in Asia, who are highly competent speakers of English, sometimes even rivalling native speakers. Such stories are told by Daiwa in his observations in South East Asia, and by Bando and Honda in East Asia. Their observations are consistent with the literature review in Chapter 3-3 about use of BELF in Asia. Another observation is that Japanese business people are increasingly having to use English, especially in Asia. Daiwa, Wakaya and Honda all say that they feel they have more occasions to use English as a lingua franca among Asian counterparts, with whom they would have used Japanese or local languages or hired translators over 10 years ago. Momo suggested that this was a result of the relative decline of the Japanese economy, whilst Daiwa argued that it was likely due to the increased number of young Asians who are fluent users of English.

In summary, the participants' observations in this study confirm that English is increasingly being used as a lingua franca in business, and that the use of English has become pragmatic and flexible, departing from the norms of traditional native Englishes. This confirms the findings of BELF researchers (e.g. Ehrenreich, 2010; Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2007).

8-1-2 Changes in individual factors

In this section, I focus on how changes within participants' career path have influenced their use of and competence in English based on their stories. The majority of participants in this study have only worked for one company. Consequently, many participants have developed their career in a specific field, such as in engineering, trading, banking, research, or marketing, and accumulated their professional experiences within this particular field. In many cases, participants have risen within the corporate hierarchy while expanding their responsibility into managerial roles. Simultaneously, many participants have relocated geographically to deal with new counterparts from different parts of the world, although other participants have only worked in Japan but have travelled frequently to deal with a variety of people in different countries.

8-1-2-1 Changing roles and becoming a manager

When participants' stories are read as a chain of experiences, and as a trajectory of their business careers, it is clear that many participants have experienced a change in the way they use English. This is because participants have had to adapt for new roles they have been given, and each role in a business has a different purpose. Itoh's trajectory provides one example of this phenomenon. When he started his career at a trading company, going on an overnight sightseeing trip with a foreign client was a challenging experience for him. Because he had had little experience of speaking in English before he joined the company, he found it extremely difficult to communicate with the client, and there were awkward silences. A few years later, as a junior staff, he worked as a commodity trader in Singapore for several years. He was responsible for all stages of daily trading as an individual player. This required him to communicate trading orders over the phone, and read and write relatively simple and routine follow up mails and memos daily. At the time, his main challenge was to ensure that there were no misunderstandings during simple and routine trading transactions (Chapter 7-1-4, Excerpt 27). He then worked in Saudi Arabia to facilitate trading between Japanese and Saudi Arabian clients. His responsibility was to serve as an intermediary for negotiations between the two parties, and he assisted them in reaching agreements. This responsibility required him to have negotiation skills, while paying attention to significant cultural differences between Saudi Arabia and Japan. Almost 10 years later, he represented his firm in a series of regular multinational meetings (Chapter 7-1-1, Excerpt 23) for an international consortium to negotiate contracts for long-term high stake development projects. For this role, he needed to read plenty of business and legal documents, and he had to take part in the tough negotiation meetings alongside representatives of MNCs, including those from the US and the UK (Chapter 7-1-3, Excerpt 25).

Itoh's career shows his shift from a newcomer in Tokyo, to a single professional player in Singapore, to a manager in Saudi Arabia, and finally, to a representative of his firm. The demands on him have become more complex over time. Whilst at first, he was only expected to be able to engage in routine communication with his counterparts in Singapore, he was later required to take part in two-party negotiations with his clients in Saudi Arabia and Japan, and in his most recent position, he has had to participate in multinational and multiparty meetings. The nature of his responsibilities have changed from conducting daily routine work, to intermediating between two negotiating parties, and to pursuing his firm's interests through negotiating with multiple parties with complex conflicts of interests. From his interview, he is certain that the last assignment required the highest level of English, and he describes this as a 'completely new level'. When he reflects upon the time he was assigned this job, he 'absolutely hated attending the meetings', but he eventually became able to make an impact at these meetings (Chapter 7-1-1, Excerpt 23). He developed his skills of using English step-by-step through his career as he faced new challenges. It can be seen that because he was able to improve his skills to achieve his business tasks at each stage, he was consequently assigned to more complex tasks. Although he became an effective BELF user at a young age as a commodity trader in Singapore, he has repeatedly faced new challenges which have required different communicative skills in English. Consequently, he responded by accumulating and acquiring further skills over the time. His repertoire of English was dynamic in the process of his career, and evolved continuously.

Yoshimi also speaks of how the required skills for working in international organisations changed significantly between his first two years in Kenya and his second assignment as an operational officer three years later in Europe. In the first assignment, he found it tough to process daily routine activities in English, because he was often 'left out' during meetings (Chapter 7-1-1, Excerpt 17). In the second assignment, however, he felt he was 'already' able to do the work in English since he was 'generally' able to negotiate in English. This time, his challenge was to process his work in a timely manner, as his position required him to conduct daily operations efficiently (Chapter 7-1-5). He reflects back on the time by saying that he was able to maintain and improve his skills in English, only because he kept learning English during the two and a half years in Japan between the assignments.

Kaga perceives language skills for 'business negotiations' to be much more demanding than the skills required for an 'engineering discussion among engineers'. Kaga started using English when he was sent to study at graduate school in the USA, where he developed the English skills needed to study civil engineering. After he came back, he worked as an engineer for a while, and then, he progressed to being a manager, a position from which he oversaw several engineers. Today, he is responsible for negotiating long-term contracts with clients overseas. He feels that engineers can communicate in English with very limited English skills (Chapter 6-4, Excerpt 14). However, when he became a manager, he felt frustrated because of his inability to communicate nuances perfectly.

Excerpt 59 - Kaga

R: Do you feel the need to communicate nuances as part of your job? And does that apply for engineering roles?

A: If I were just an engineer, it wouldn't be necessary. However, in my position, it is different. When we discuss contract terms, business issues, and deal with problems, we need to discuss complex issues.

Similarly, Gotoh clearly perceives the language skills required for engineers to talk about technical issues to be different and less complex than those needed for people to discuss business issues. Although daily use of the language on the project site as an engineer was relatively easy and quickly acquired, he says that he could do business negotiations only after a year of working at the site, because of the difference in the language skills required. He progressed to a 'new stage' of communication, because he was assigned to a different role, and he learnt how to handle such negotiations from his own experience of using English. His story shows how he had a fluid and flexible skill set that he adapted and broadened swiftly as his role changed.

Meanwhile, Chika's comments about her experiences attending multinational negotiation meetings show clear changes in her attitude and demonstrate that she required different English skills for each of the three different stages of her career. When she was a junior staff, and used English seriously at work for the first time, she was in her mid or late thirties. She generally understood what was being discussed at the meeting, but she found it very difficult to participate.

Excerpt 60 - Chika

C: Only if I could contribute something which was fundamental or meaningful to the topic that was being discussed, I used to give '*pass*' [achieve the minimum acceptable level] for that meeting in my mind [at the time].

Because she found it difficult to contribute, and co-construct her opinion during meetings, she prepared what she wanted to say as a full script in English before meetings. She considered this was the best way for her to participate at the time, given her relative lack of experience and English skills at the time. A few years later, she attended another series of multinational meetings as one of three members, which included her boss. Her attitude changed from the previous assignment.

Excerpt 61 - Chika

C: I didn't know the language well enough to discuss detailed nuances. For example, when we had some points we needed to make, we had to explain the reasons behind our arguments. That's very difficult when you don't have the sufficient vocabulary. I could convey it to some degree. That might make them think, 'I see…' but that's not enough…

R: Is that how you felt after the meetings?

C: I felt like I could have explained points in a much clearer way, even during the meeting. Meetings often left me feel that I'd performed at a level which was below what I was capable of.

After this experience, she attended another series of meetings as a leader with her subordinate and was fully responsible for the negotiations. The details of this experience have been discussed in Chapter 7-1-1 (Excerpt 22). In summary, she felt she needed to make the right comment at the right time by considering the flow of the discussion. Therefore, she spent a painstaking amount of time preparing in order to achieve the level that she felt she needed to perform to. Although all of the situations in which she used English could be categorised into the same situation of 'attending meetings', her role changed and what she was looking to achieve in these meetings changed over the course of these three stages.

In this section, I have illustrated the perceived changes in use of English by five participants, namely Itoh, Yoshimi, Kaga, Gotoh, and Chika. What is clearly common among the changes across the five participants is that their English skills change according to the needs of their job. These needs are often different according to the business contexts in which the participants are situated. Blommaert considers these repertoires to be cases of 'truncated' repertoires being developed. He explains this phenomenon by saying that:

> We all have specific language competences and skills: we can use particular genres quite acceptably, speak in the registers that are typical of some social roles and identities…Our real 'language' is very much a biographical given, the structure of which reflects our own histories and those of the communities in which we spent our lives. (Blommaert, 2010: 103)

Because the linguistic repertoires of BELF users change as they use English, likewise their linguistic skills change and develop. The direction in which each BELF user develops their skills is unique and is a reflection of what they have done at work in English. When linguistic competence of BELF users or any other language users are studied, research tends to capture the competence of user at a particular time, or a snapshot of one's competence. However, this does not take into account that competence is a dynamic concept which changes with time. Some research tries to define the 'required level of English for business person(s)' (e.g. Koike et al., 2010). Many people in Japan try to define 'business level English' using TOEIC scores. However, the stories told by participants illustrate that the required skills of English in business can differ significantly depending on what role has to be fulfilled.

I have been interested in finding if there is a tendency for participants to change their use of English in a certain way over the course of their BELF careers. It is clear for all of the five participants in this section that the communication skills required at work tend to become more complex and subtle, and/or that participants are required to process these tasks more efficiently. However, I also found that this tendency is not applicable to all participants. Some participants, especially those in specialised professions such as Adachi, who is a researcher, or Mori, who is an engineer, say the required 'type of skills' did not change much over the course of their careers.

8-1-2-2 Working as a team and motivating others

In the previous part, I illustrated that climbing up the corporate ladder tends to require participants to handle more complex and higher risks in their communications in English. Some participants also talk about changes in the required level of English skills from a different perspective, namely, in motivating others. Becoming a manager often means transforming from a solo player to a team leader who gets things done through others (Nakahara, 2014). For BELF users, this often means having non-Japanese colleagues and subordinates with whom they need to communicate in English. Such communications may be different from that of solo players. The substantial challenge of motivating someone in English is explained by Nishii.

Excerpt 62 - Nishii

R: Talking about business communication, some say that it's relatively simple and a high skill of English is not mandatory...do you agree?

N: Yes, it would probably be possible to get away with it most of the time. But in my role, I find that you need to convey your intentions in the 'right' manner. When you have to get the work done through someone else, you have to motivate them. If you want to convey your message in English, especially only through e-mails [rather than face-to-face], and make the counterparts take your message in a positive way, in order to make them do the work, you have to think very deeply about how to convey your message.

Nishii feels that communication in English to motivate others needs to be done in the 'right' manner', and he perceives that this requires a higher level of English. Fumie specifically stresses the importance of English skills for managers in order to motivate others. When asked if she had faced any difficulties in English, she responded with the following:

Excerpt 63 - Fumie

F: The most difficult thing was motivating others… although I don't think the issue is exclusively linguistic, I definitely needed these skills when I started in my position. As a group manager, I only had two or three subordinates…but when I was promoted into a higher position, I had to convince and lead more people. It is different from one-to-one communication. I had to think of ways in which I could involve everyone…this type of communication is necessary.

R: I see

F: For instance, we'd have a company meeting…there, we would have several speakers. I had to make a speech to win the support of hundreds of members of the audience, so I needed to learn how to give convincing speeches. Writing is another aspect that changes. On a one-to-one basis, you're writing memos or letters, but then as my role changed I increasingly needed to convince multiple people through writing too.

R: I see

F: English is a common language of international business, so for leaders, it's a necessary tool for getting your point across. That's why I had to learn how to motivate people to move up the corporate ladder.

Much like Nishii, she points out that communication in English to motivate others requires advanced skills. She adds to Nishii's point by arguing that managers need to speak in 'clear and easy-to-understand English' so that subordinates can listen and understand easily. Similarly, Daiwa and Kitami also say that motivating local staff was not straightforward, as it involved communicating in the 'right' manner and respecting 'their' culture. In this way, motivating non-Japanese people in English is a necessary skill which BELF users must have to become a successful manager that supervises multinational people in a global business.

8-1-2-3 Multinational Corporations

In this part I specifically focus on stories told by Fumie, Ryoko and Bando because they have experience working for non-Japanese MNCs. I decide to give their stories particular consideration, since I feel that they had significantly different perceptions about the change of the needed English skills compared to those who had only experienced working for Japanese firms. Each of the three companies they worked for originated in the USA and claim to operate at the 'global standard'. Their colleagues are typically multinationals who have many different first languages. While Americans play key roles, the majority of employees worldwide are non-native English speakers, and they often communicate in English without the presence of any native speakers of the English language. Their stories show that the required level of English skills increases as they progress through their career path, because English is used as a corporate language at all levels for communication within these firms. This is in significant contrast to Japanese firms, where the Japanese language is used as their corporate language, and their internal communications, which are often critically important, such as corporate strategies and evaluation of performances of departments and individuals, are mainly conducted in Japanese. Although I argued that communications tends to become more complex for Japanese BELF users as they reach higher positions, as long as they work for a Japanese company, a large part of their internal communication remains in Japanese. However, Fumie, Ryoko and Bando have to communicate in English all the time, except for occasions when they communicate with other Japanese colleagues and clients. Therefore, their performance is likely being evaluated based on their communication in English only. Fumie strongly believes that gaining greater responsibility and climbing up the corporate ladder in English speaking MNCs cannot be achieved without developing English skills to a high level. She rose to a senior executive position in a global MNC, which has subsidiaries all over the world working with multinational colleagues. This is the context in which she felt a strong need to improve English skills constantly as a manager, despite being a confident English user from the early stages of her career. Additionally, as discussed previously, she considers the English skills needed to motivate others as being crucial for managers (Chapter 8-1-2-2).

Fumie argues that working in a global company opens up opportunities to work globally for any employer from any country. She says that any capable staff in Japanese offices can have opportunities to work beyond the borders of Japan, but that this is only an option for those who make continuous efforts in developing their communication skills in English.

Excerpt 64 - Fumie

F: When they [Japanese executives who later became successful at her firm] joined the firm, some were able to speak some English, but others spoke none at all. If you ask why they could build up such strong English skills while working here even from zero, I'd say it was through determination. Their desire to be assigned a more exciting job, to shoulder more responsibilities, and to advance their careers… this was what made them commit to learning English, and our firm supports such people as well.

When Fumie speaks specifically about how she moved up the corporate ladder within the firm, she says that 'English had been both a weapon and a tool' in opening up her career. She stresses the importance of determination and commitment in developing the English skills required to become a leader in the firm, and she talks strongly about her own commitment to English as well. She is the only one who describes herself as having almost native-like English skills among the participants who had grown up and been educated exclusively in Japan. She is also the only participant who talks of the potential needs of accent reduction training. She says that in order to become a leader in an MNC, it is necessary to speak easy-to-listen-to English, without a strong accent, stutters, or repetitive phrases. Although she did not have these issues personally, she tells the story of some leaders in her firm who did actually participate in accent reduction training programmes. According to her, such programmes had a significant influence on their communication. Ryoko and Bando, who also worked in global MNCs, did not have such strong commitments to English, but they both feel that stronger English skills are needed to be promoted into higher positions at MNCs. Ryoko and Bando also clearly say that it is not necessary nor possible to achieve native level English for them. Regardless, since they believe strong English skills is essential for their aspirations of becoming a manager in their respective firms, they make a considerable effort to improve their English.

In contrast to Fumie's statements, other participants who work in Japanese firms do not have such strong beliefs that senior managers need to have stronger English skills. Although I stated that changes in positions in a person's career tend to require more complex and higher risk communication skills (Chapter 8-1-2-1) even among participants working in Japanese firms, many participants say that it is not 'mandatory' for senior managers in Japanese firms to conduct such highly difficult communications in English by themselves. If senior managers' English skills are limited, they can use interpreters or assistance from staff to communicate in such a way, as Momo previously pointed out (Chapter 7-1-4, Excerpt 29). Many participants say that it is more important for senior managers in Japanese firms to have a high competence in communication in

Japanese and possess strong professional business skills. There is a striking difference in perception about the relative importance of linguistic skills between participants working in non-Japanese MNCs and those in Japanese firms.

8-2 Learning at work

In the previous section, I illustrated how participants' use of English have changed continuously over the course of their careers, especially when they experience a change in positions. Consequently, they often face new challenges which require skills they do not have at the time. This section focuses on how participants have dealt with these new challenges.

Overall, the participants said that they somehow managed to deal with and overcome new challenges. In fact, none of the participants felt they experienced total failure because of their level of English was insufficient. Their experiences support Nakahara's argument (2012) that the majority of Japanese business people can overcome the challenges in communications at overseas assignments. Nevertheless, 'communication with non-Japanese people' remains one of the top challenges for Japanese business people in overseas assignments (Nakahara, 2012: 225).

8-2-1 Different types of learning at work

Nakahara (2010) argues that 'learning at work' can be categorised into the following:

- Off-site learning – learning and training that occurs off-site
- Learning from coaching – coaching from somebody in a working environment
- Learning from experience – learning by accumulating and reflecting on experiences

When I examine participants' stories, I find that categorising learning into these three groups is useful when considering how participants learnt to deal with new challenges at work. Many participants say that off-site training equips them with new English skills needed for their roles. Participants' stories show that off-site training is typically provided at two different points of their career. The first and most mentioned is the English language training provided at the point of entry to firms where English is considered as necessary for the majority of employees. The new hire training was discussed in Chapter 6-3-7 as one of themes about their initial transition.

Intensive language training is also often provided before overseas assignments for those who have not used English at work previously. Gotoh received a month of training before he went to Sweden as a trainee, Takeda attended training for sixth months before he went to London and Wakaya also received six months of training, but in French rather than in English, because he went to Zaire. All three evaluate the training positively, saying that it made it possible for them to reach an acceptable level of oral communication at the start of their overseas assignment.

8-2-2 Learning from coaching

In this section, I explore how 'learning from coaching' has helped participants to develop the English skills. Learning from coaching at work is, according to Nakahara (2010), evoked by intentional help from others in their working environment. Examples include proof reading of e-mails or giving feedback, with the 'coaching' typically provided by senior colleagues or managers. Among the participants, Fumie and Ryoko spoke extensively about the 'coaching' they received at their respective American based MNCs. In these firms, support for subordinates is defined as a distinctive and important responsibility of managers. Therefore, Fumie says her manager assisted her by proofreading and gave feedback on her style of writing in English. Her manager also helped her develop her presentation skills in English by organising and attending rehearsals to give her feedback. The coaching support in these firms is explicit and systematic.

On the contrary, the coaching system in Japanese companies seems to be more subtle and implicit. For instance, Gotoh and Kaga say that they delegated the task of writing minutes of meetings in English they attended together to subordinates. Their stories suggest that whilst they are clearly aiming to coach their subordinates through these tasks, it is not clear whether their subordinates are aware of this. In Gotoh's case, he often assigns the task of writing summary e-mails of meetings to a subordinate. These e-mails are then sent to counterparts in India as confirmation of their discussion. When Gotoh reviews drafts in English, he usually gives advice such as 'the content is not detailed enough and it may cause some misunderstanding'. He also says that he does not check the grammar because he does not believe that grammatical correctness is required in this context. In Kaga's case, he assigns subordinates to write the minutes of business meetings that they attend during business trips so that Kaga can monitor how much of the content of the meeting in English the subordinates have understood. He also monitors how the level of understanding of meetings of his subordinates changes in the long term, which enables him to give feedback to support the improvement of their English skills.

Daiwa says that when he was relatively new in his office, he used to ask his senior colleagues to proofread his e-mails and other business correspondences. However, many other participants say that coaching as a form of proofreading is often situated within the process of getting approvals for mails and documents to be sent outside the firm. Kitami explains how the system worked in his *Shosha*. Kitami said that whilst the company did not have any explicit guidelines on proofreading documents written by employees, his senior colleagues checked his documents.

Excerpt 65 - Kitami

R: Were there some supports [for writing English documents] in your firm?

K: Yes but it wasn't mandatory for the documents to be checked before being sent out.

R: So you could judge for yourself, you mean?

K: Any document that went outside the firm needed approval from a superior that was the rule. The superiors have to sign the documents, so they read them before they do so.

R: Did the superiors sometimes say that your English wasn't good enough?

K: Yes, they did. I don't remember the number of times my drafts were returned by superiors… if they approved what I had written, it was sent to the general manager for his approval…by that stage, the quality of English would have been pretty good because I had rewritten the draft several times…

R: So you mean, you were trained on how to write documents in English by undergoing this process?

K: Yes, exactly.

This situated coaching system in the Japanese firm is similar to the characteristics of apprenticeships in the discussion of the framework of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) which are discussed by Ehrenreich and Koester (Ehrenreich, 2010; Koester, 2010) as a framework to conceptualise business people's learning process of English skills in BELF contexts.

8-2-3 Learning from experience

8-2-3-1 Effectiveness of learning from experience

Many participants say that self-learning through experience is the most effective way of learning. 'Learning English by using it' and 'getting used to' the language were commonly used phrases when participants talked about how they improved their English skills at work. For instance, Wakaya reflects upon his experience before he went to Taiwan where English was used as a working language. He did not take intensive training even though he could have, and I asked why.

Excerpt 66 - Wakaya

W: I was already able to use English to some degree, and it is much quicker [to learn English] if I start using English in practice, even though it is not easy at the beginning.'

His belief in the effectiveness of 'learning through practice' is backed by his own experience of learning French in Zaire after only 6 months of training in Japan. He says he was excited to learn French from daily use, in contrast to learning English in the classroom.

Excerpt 67 - Wakaya

W: At the beginning…I was there [in Zaire] for two years…At the beginning, I wondered what I could say [in French]. But as I learned, gradually, I became able to speak…It was very interesting.

R: You mean, you used routine sentences?

W: Both routine sentences and more advanced ones… I couldn't use complex sentences at the beginning, of course. At first I learnt basic sentences, then, I advanced to using complex sentences…it was like that.

R: I see, so you became good at French.

W: Yes, especially in speaking. I think I was pretty good at reading as well. Then after a year, I went to Europe for holiday [from Zaire]. When I went, I had no problems in communicating in France and Switzerland…I was surprised that I could speak so well with only a year's worth of practice…of course they gave me compliments [about my French], but that was it. I started from zero. Compared to English which I learned from junior high school, high school and through to university…My French improved drastically within a very short time frame because I used it every day.

His experience of learning French from scratch through practice made him believe in the effectiveness of learning English at work in Taiwan. Throughout the interview, he repeatedly says that English skills used at work cannot be taught passively in classrooms. He also says that 'you have to learn yourself', and that it is difficult to use English unless you have 'accumulated experience of using English abroad or at work'.

8-2-3-2 Learning by imitating others

On the process of learning through experience, participants often tell stories about how they would imitate those around them to develop their skills. In Ryoko's case, she learned how to write business letters by reading others' documents and imitating them.

Excerpt 68 - Ryoko

Ry: If you look around, the style of writing [in the firm] doesn't vary much. As for sentences, you do not find many different expressions. So I imitated others as I found appropriate. Imitating others' documents is effective…the style was to some degree standardised, so any document could be a model for me.

Ryoko also says that she learned the difference in communication style between English and Japanese, from watching others and imitating them. Ryoko later explained that she learned how to write business documents from both good and 'bad' examples, and by comparing them, she independently learned how to write effectively.

Chika also imitated the style of English she encountered, but in her case, she learnt by analysing the style of a negotiation expert she attended meetings with, rather than imitating her boss or her colleagues.

Excerpt 69 - Chika

R: How is this type of 'English for meetings' learned?

C: In my case, I was not trained, and, out of the blue, I was assigned to a position to attend a meeting as a representative. In the case of people who had attended lots of meetings of this type from a younger age, it may have been possible for them to learn from their senior colleagues, but I didn't have such an opportunity. I actually recorded the meetings at the beginning… I don't think it was very appropriate though. I recorded the meetings twice, and compared it to the minutes. I examined how a certain negotiation expert from Europe, with 30 years of experience, spoke in English. I think this was how I learned.

R: I see, did you find his English to be different?

C: Yes, absolutely. I still want to learn from him, as he used lots of brilliant expressions@@ His diction always made me feel 'oh, I should have said this in that way on this occasion'.

R: You mean you found lots of expressions which were different from what Japanese people used?

C: I don't know whether these were expressions which were used by Japanese people or not, or whether these expressions were used by the experienced, but yes, they were different…

When she needed to learn English expressions used for particular situations, she selected particular counterparts who used 'lots of brilliant expressions' as her model. She chose an experienced non-native English speaker rather than a native speaker as her model. This demonstrates that she values the more pragmatic skills of a non-native expert, more so than the skills of a native speaker. In her later discussions, she explains that she imitated expressions from interlocutors more spontaneously on the spot during meetings.

Excerpt 70 – Chika

C: During meetings, while I was listening to opinions of other people in English, I was also thinking about my ideas. My original ideas were often in Japanese, and I transferred my ideas from Japanese into English, by imitating expressions that other people had just used to express their opinions.

R: Oh, I see.

C: I tended to speak after listening to other people's opinions, because I could learn suitable expressions from others. While I was listening, I summarised my ideas in English. That's how I developed my English sentences. Then, I'd say 'Having heard others' opinions, I have come to the opinion that…' That's how I did things @@@

R: @@@

C: I could say 'I would like to ask you to reconsider this point which I strongly feel is important…' @@

R: Wow, that is clever@@

In Chapter 7-1-1, I argued that co-constructing opinions during meetings can be difficult (Excerpt 19), and Chika's story explains how she learnt to co-construct ideas in English during meetings. By imitating expressions which other people had used on the spot, she could use appropriate terminologies and expressions on the topic, even though she was not fully familiar with it. Although she developed her opinions in English at the last minute in this rather hectic way, this allowed her to pretend that she was familiar with the field in English. In other words, this was her secret 'tactics' of handling meetings at the time. Chika and I laughed together because we shared a feeling that 'imitating somebody' is like taking a shortcut, and bypassing the official course of learning.

Some other participants including Fumie, Nishii, and Adachi also say that they learned the necessary English skills by imitating others. Nishii says he only knew very formal and 'bookish' English, and thus, he intentionally imitated expressions from e-mails from his business partners to learn more casual and natural styles of business communication. Adachi says that he imitated expressions in scientific reports he had read when writing. Fumie says 'absorbing English skills by imitating others' is mandatory, while stressing that self-learning from experience and systematic coaching are also necessary.

8-2-3-3 An intention to learn

The participants' stories show that learning from experience is not a mere accumulation of experiences of using English. It also involves a proactive intention to learn. From the stories I discussed as examples of learning from imitating, it is obvious that participants had the proactive 'intention' of improving their English skills when imitating others. Adachi says that some of his colleagues made a conscious effort to learn from experience effectively by noting down vocabulary they encountered at work. Daiwa says that he intentionally used a dictionary thoroughly when he wrote business documents during the earlier stages of his career, because he wanted to improve his vocabulary. Fumie says that all of the successful Japanese managers had the determination and strong will to improve their English, with the continuous intention of learning from experience. All of these comments suggest that participants believe that mere accumulation of experience of using English does not necessary lead to improved English, but the situated learning from 'work experience' happens more effectively when they have a proactive intention to learn from experience. I will come back to the intention of learning in Chapter 8-3, to discuss what motivates or demotivates participants to have such intentions.

8-2-3-4 Studying English

It is also interesting, however, to see that some participants perceive learning from experience to be insufficient for developing their English skills at work. Instead, they perceive that they must combine it with 'studying' to improve English skills effectively. For instance, Yoshimi self-studied English by reading and listening to the news, and memorising vocabulary. He perceives his English skills to have improved by both learning from experience and self-studying. Itoh also says that he improved his English, not only from learning from experience but also from studying English when he took standardised tests to apply for MBA programmes. He says that he had three major learning phases. The first phase was his first assignment abroad in Singapore, and the second phase was when he studied to apply for MBA programmes in the USA.

Excerpt 71 - Itoh

I: My second significant learning experience was when I applied for MBA programmes at American universities. I studied TOEFL and GMAT for about a year and a half, I think. I improved my reading and writing significantly. This period of study formed the foundation of my reading and writing skills I used later.

He continues by saying that the third significant stage of his learning was his assignment to regularly attend multinational meetings (Chapter 7-1-1 Excerpt 23), and learning from experience again. Self-studying English is often perceived to be an effective supplement for learning from experience. Momo says that she attended an English conversation school to brush up on her conversation skills. Wakaya self-studied English by revising what he had learned at junior and high school before he started his first assignment using English abroad. Kitami says his English is not 'that good' because he only learned from experience at work, but because he did not 'study English' sufficiently. It is not clear if he meant to say that he did not study sufficiently at school or that he did not study after graduation. However, his comment shows his belief that in his case, learning from experience was not enough and that 'studying English' was necessary even if he could have learnt English from his daily use. These comments from participants show that many participants perceive 'studying English' as a proper and necessary way of improving their English skills, even if they have plenty of opportunities to learn from experience.

8-2-3-5 Forgetting English

So far I have discussed how participants consider business English skills as something that is most often acquired at work, especially from experiences at work. Many participants believe they can improve their English skills if they continue using English or use English often. Many participants also say that they have forgotten English, or their English skills 'went down' during the period when they did not use it. In this part, I would like to briefly touch upon participants' perception about 'forgetting English'.

I firstly point out the two characteristics which may be relatively unique to Japanese BELF users. Firstly, many BELF users, including participants in this study, spend relatively long periods within their career working on domestic assignments. Because most Japanese firms depend more on domestic rather than international business, domestic assignments are often considered as more important for their business career than international assignments. Secondly, once (ex)BELF users are assigned to domestic roles, they often do not use English at all during that period, because English is not widely used in Japan. Consequently, many participants say they actually forgot English to a certain degree, or their English skills 'went down' during domestic assignments. Momo says that if she does not use English for many years, she loses her 'courage' to use English and forgets her vocabulary. Suzuki did not use English for 20 years following his MBA studies in America. When he was assigned to a role in Europe to use English again, he needed to put in a few months into rebuilding his English skills. Many others including Gotoh, Itoh, and Jinbou say that they felt that their English skills dropped when they were assigned roles in Japan. Maintaining their English skills during periods of domestic assignments is considered difficult, and some participants made a conscious effort to keep 'studying' or 'using' English even in Japan, since, otherwise there are no opportunities to use English at all. Reading English newspapers and watching English news programmes seems to be popular practice among participants wishing to maintain their English skills when they are in Japan, or working in roles in which English is not required. Yoshimi, Jinbou, Suzuki, Erika, Mori, Wakaya, Takeda, Nishii and Chika all said that they read English newspapers or watched English news programmes when they did not use English at work. It shows that, for many participants, after learning English through experience and becoming skilful BELF users, they still need to make a conscious effort to maintain their English skills when they do not use English, or they may lose their linguistic repertories in English.

Participants originally learnt to use English by accumulating skills in the working environment. On the other hand, when they do not use English at work, they perceive that they lose these skills. In this sense, the English skills they have are not static, but rather, dynamic, and ever-changing over time with ups and downs. They are a reflection of the variety of challenges a participant has faced and overcome whilst using English. As Todeva and Cenoz say, their English repertoires are not 'static personal factors' (2009). This process of learning English goes on, so long as the participant continues to face new challenges of using English and makes a conscious effort to learn from these experiences.

8-3 How Japanese BELF users make sense of their trajectories

In this sub-chapter, I discuss how participants perceive the changes in their English skills over the course of their business careers. Firstly, I discuss how participants feel about their trajectory of English use based on how they reflect on their careers. I then analyse how participants make sense of their use of English and what factors might influence their sense-making.

8-3-1 Feeling of achievement

As I discussed in previous chapters, the participants generally evaluate their English communication performances in their business career to be positive and satisfactory. Wakaya says he enjoys his current job which requires him to export advanced technologies produced by his firm to many different countries.

Excerpt 73 - Wakaya

W: I think it is an interesting job. Some may not like this kind of work though. When you go abroad, you have to do everything by yourself. It is much more interesting than the routine work in Japan. In our job, we have new challenges every time we start a new project. Every project has a different challenge. When I finish one challenge in a project, then I face a new one. This is why this job is fun.

Although he is not talking exclusively about the international nature of his role, he clearly enjoys the unpredictable aspect that comes with the job. The breadth of challenges he faces can be seen as a consequence of the wide range of countries he has worked in. These countries include developed and major ones such as America or France, but also unfamiliar and developing countries such as Congo and Myanmar. He speaks with confidence and pride as a pioneer in his company. When he talks specifically about English skills, it is clear that he is a confident and skilful BELF user. He often reads 100 page reports in English, gives presentations in English all over the world, negotiates deals with executives of various firms in different countries, and above all, he successfully leads his team to win large scale projects and executes them. Because of such experiences, he considers himself as someone who has an extensive understanding of business in English and someone who can teach others on how they should conduct business in English. He considers himself to be different from 'other' Japanese colleagues, who are typically afraid of making errors in English and follow the Japanese communication style, even when communicating in English.

Listening to participants' trajectory of use of English was similar to listening to their life histories. Participants spoke of a range of unique and interesting experiences, and as such their trajectories are very different from one other. Nonetheless, all participants were positive when talking about their use of English and I could sense the confidence they had in their ability, and the sense of achievement they had felt by becoming successful BELF users. Bando, Ryoko, Itoh, Nishii, Honda and Fumie said that they have 'stronger' English skills compared to other

Japanese colleagues, or Japanese business people in general, whilst others including Daiwa, Kitami, Takeda, Adachi, and Mori, consider themselves as one of the many English users among their colleagues, who are not particularly strong, but capable of handling business. Either way, each of the participants demonstrate their confidence in their abilities as a BELF user. Whilst they had some communication breakdowns and difficulties, they somehow managed to 'repair' or overcome such issues. When participants reflect back on their trajectory as BELF users, they consider these communication breakdowns as minor setbacks and not a 'big problem' so long as they can still achieve or fulfil their goals in business. In this way, participants' attitudes towards BELF are flexible and pragmatic, as discussed by BELF researchers in Europe (e.g. Ehrenreich, 2010; Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2007).

8-3-2 Feeling of frustration

In spite of the positive reflections that participants have on their trajectory of use of English, many still reveal that they feel they 'could have done better' or experience a sense of 'frustration'.

Nishii, who is currently the CEO of a subsidiary of an American firm in Japan, has been using English extensively in business for over 30 years. He still feels he has limitations when speaking English.

Excerpt 74 - Nishii

N: I don't like speaking in English, even now, because I'm not good at it.

R: Why is that?

N: If I could quantify my speaking ability in Japanese, let's call it 100. Then I reckon the same figure for speaking in English would only be 80 or 90. If I were to write, again, giving the value of 100 to my Japanese, my English is maybe 90.

Having become the CEO of an international firm, Nishii may be considered a highly successful international business person. However, Nishii is not perfectly content with his level of English. I was rather surprised to hear this sense of frustration from a seemingly very confident and experienced BELF user. In her study of German managers in German MNCs, Ehrenreich reported that 'English is regarded as a natural part of their daily business' and she said that '[German managers] mentioned repeatedly that it is not something they give much thought to outside an interview with a linguist' (Ehrenreich, 2009; 2010; 2011). I found Nishii's feelings of persistent frustration quite different from what Ehrenreich reports about German managers.

Furthermore, it was not only Nishii who had such frustrations. Daiwa, who has worked in a *Shosha* for over 20 years, and developed his career in international trading, also speaks of his reservations towards his communication skills in English when he was in charge of an overseas subsidiary of the firm.

Excerpt 75 - Daiwa

D: I think I felt that my English was not good enough… During meetings, I felt that I was still not able to say 100% of what I wanted to express. I felt that I was not able to use the right expressions.

R: So you mean that you could convey the underlying messages, but the expressions weren't as specific as you'd want them?

D: Even if I could convey what I wanted to say, the question is, if that is enough to persuade clients when I am in negotiation with them…I felt that if I could speak better, I could have been more convincing…I wanted to do more than describing something…what I was undertaking was not simple communication…it was difficult. I think it is always difficult to express something complicated, such as getting interlocutors to compromise… I wanted to have better English skills…

R: Did you have actual problems? Did you have troubles?

D: I mean, I never achieved 100% of what I could have done. Maybe 90%, something like that. I don't mean as low as 50%, and it definitely wasn't a total disaster…

Like Nishii, Daiwa feels that he has performed his work in English relatively well. However, he still feels that with better English skills he could have been more successful in his negotiations in English. By comparing his level of **English** to his level of **Japanese**, Daiwa shows that he is frustrated by the fact that he could not fully express ideas that he had come up with in Japanese. He believes that his limited English skills have prevented him from making the most use out of his extensive range of business negotiation skills. This feeling of frustration in English communication in comparison to one's mother tongue is rarely discussed in linguistic research, although Rogerson-Revell (2008:350) briefly touches upon the issue. However, in this study this frustration is repeatedly mentioned by participants.

Kaga, who is responsible for highly complicated business negotiations in English, also spoke of his frustrations when conducting business tasks.

Excerpt 76 - Kaga

R: So as you said, you have been doing business in English. Do you have any difficulties or challenges because you are using English?

A: The most challenging thing is…everything @@

R: @@

A: Almost anything in English is difficult…

R: Do you think it is because of the language?

A: I think it is partly due to the difficulty of the language, but it also includes differences in culture, as well.

R: You mean, you are not satisfied with the way you express your thoughts in English, or you feel that you can express well in English, but others do not understand what you are trying to get across?

A: I'm not satisfied with my expressions.

R: You mean you are not able to express your feelings…?

A: Yes, I feel that I am not able to express in English exactly. For instance, if you check a word in the dictionary, the word has three different definitions and you know all of them. But in reality, the word has lots of different meanings, not just these three… something around the word - the 'aura' …I cannot express this 'aura' in English. I can communicate using very narrowly defined words, but I can't capture the nuances that might be attached with a particular word. It can happen in Japanese as well, but it is a much bigger problem in English. This is something that I find extremely difficult.

R: Do you think communicating this 'aura' is necessary for your current job? Do you need to communicate these minute nuances…is it important?

A: I wish I could. When you do business, when you are about to start a project with a partner for the coming 10 years, or even 20…it is like judging if this marriage is good for you... and I have to make a judgement.

R: Right

A: This is about how much I understand the company… or …the character of the partner. When I make decisions, I ask myself how fully I understand… I always have some uncertainties or uneasiness. In order to be sure, to be confident, I want them to understand us, and I want to understand them…this is the ideal situation. But my English skills are significantly below that level.

He talks about this kind of frustration again when he explains his current project.

Excerpt 77 - Kaga

A: I think it is much easier, if what I am doing is simple. Something that has a binary yes or no answer. But [in my job,] if I don't understand nuances, I can't understand exactly what they are insisting or demanding.

R: So you mean, you often have very complicated negotiations…? Do these long term negotiations involve high stakes or lots of money?

A: Yes, for instance, if our contribution to a project changes by even a few percent, in the long run, the damage I cause to my firm could be significant...

R: You've been doing these negotiations for years…

A: I have to say that, for some projects, negotiations go very smoothly without any difficulties…So, I don't mean that I always face very tough situations. I don't know how my predecessors have done in the past, but I think in these situations, one's ability has a great impact on the outcome.

There is no doubt that Kaga is dealing with highly complex and high stake negotiations, and even if he does the negotiations in Japanese, his mother tongue, it would be extremely difficult. He is not only engaging in tough negotiations in English instead of Japanese, but he is also virtually alone in dealing with these negotiations. He does not have senior colleagues who understand business overseas well to support him in the negotiations (7-3-2, Excerpt 55). Given the immense pressure he must be under, I find his desire to have better linguistic skills in English compelling. He is frustrated with the 'fuzziness' of his English. He is not content with only 'establishing intelligibility'. It is also clear that he desires 'high command' of English, which can be clearly distinguished from pursing the 'native norm', which often becomes the centre of debate among ELF researchers (e.g. Seidlhofer, 2011). I interpret his desiring 'high command' of English as a pursuit for linguistic repertoires in English which make it possible to communicate 'effectively', rather than pursuing native level proficiency. Nevertheless, I will come back to this point later in the section, since it is important to consider whether there is that much of a difference between these two end goals in practice.

Kaga's feeling of being pressurised in BELF communications or feeling of 'tension' is similar to how Itoh felt scared when he was involved in international meetings which would have had significant and long term influences on his company (7-1-4, discussion after Excerpt 27). According to Itoh, one 'cannot make an excuse based on the language…once you are assigned to the role, all you can do is to give it your best'. Because of this feeling, Itoh worked hard to improve his negotiation skills in order to handle highly challenging communications in English. Chika is also aware that the negotiations in English which she takes part in may have significant consequences for the firm she is working for (7-1-1, Excerpt 22). Consequently, she feels her current English communication skills are not 'enough'.

Excerpt 78 - Chika

C: I am not sure if I can speak English well, but even if I can communicate at a basic level, I do not have the skills to dig into the minute nuances…

R: You mean you don't know the language well enough to express the minute nuances…?

C: For instance, we'd have something we need to insist on, and we have to explain it…the words to explain it would not be anything special, but I've had a hard time trying to explain the reasoning behind our demands…

R: You mean, you could explain the reasons, but that was not enough?

C: To some degree, they may understand what I'm saying, but it's not enough. Even when I'm speaking… I still feel that there is probably a better way of explaining things…

Among the 34 participants I interviewed, only Fumie and Honda said that they currently do not feel frustrations to their use of English. As I discussed in 6-2-1, both of them have been passionate English learners from a very young age, and have proudly considered their strong English skills as a key asset throughout their careers. All others, despite many of them being very experienced BELF users, say that feelings of frustration, unsureness, or that there is room for improvement are still present. Takeda says that he always feels that he has a 'handicap' communicating in English, because in English, he can say only 70 to 80% of what he wants.

These stories demonstrate the shared feelings of frustration among participants because they feel they are unable to perform to their full capacity in English. Nishii, Daiwa, Kaga and Chika all explain their feelings of frustration by comparing their performance in **English** as a non-native speaker to their own performance in **Japanese** as a native speaker, which they benchmark as their maximum potential capacity achievable. They may want to have 'native like competence' in English, not because they want to use English in the same way as native speakers of English, but because they want to use **English** to the same level as they use **Japanese**. In this respect, I find these participants' perceptions to be more complex than Seidlhofer's argument (2011) about ELF users' 'native norms'. She says that '[f]or non-native ELF speakers, being able to use the language like native speakers and without traces of their L1 is increasingly perceived as unnecessary, unrealistic' and they 'operate according to their own 'common sense criteria' which 'relate not to externally defined native-speaker norms but to their emically perceived communicative needs and wants in the situation they find themselves in' (2011: 50). The above four participants want to have much higher competence in English as if they use Japanese as native speakers of Japanese. These 'needs and wants' are not related to 'externally defined native speaker norms' such as using English as British use, but 'internally perceived' native competence, which is perceived as the communicative level that they can perform to in Japanese. Seidlhofer makes her argument mainly based on her analysis of the corpus of ELF users in Europe, and her argument that I quoted above may be rational within the scope of her study. However, my analysis is based on stories of BELF users and their own sense making. This is something that does not emerge easily from analysing corpus data. Based on my analysis of participants' stories, I would argue that Seidlhofer's description of ELF users is, at least for my participants, over-simplified. I feel that more in-depth analysis is needed to understand their internal sense-making how they set target competence in English.

8-3-3 Satisficing

Having illustrated how most participants have feelings of frustration regarding their English skills at work, in this section, I now discuss how participants deal with these realities. I discuss several participants with different perceptions about their needs of English skills at work. Itoh's story illustrates the complexity of his sense-making.

Excerpt 80 - Itoh

R: In your role, do you feel that there are any benefits to improving your English?

I: Yes I do. But it's more for my own satisfaction.

R: Do you think there would be any sizeable difference in performance as a result of such an improvement?

I: Well, I care about the English that is written on letters which are sent out with my name. I don't want to be seen as having a poor level of English, especially in writing. This is because when I am on the receiving end of letters which are full of errors and badly structured sentences, not only do I look down on the sender, I also begin to wonder whether I can rely/respect the company too.

R: I see.

I: I know I make errors too, but of course I'd rather not. I don't want to be seen as being unable to communicate well, because I'm Japanese. When I send something out with my name on it, it's not just my reputation on the line, it's also the company's.

R: So you mean you should not make errors?

I: That's what I think. I'm not trying to achieve the native standard, but I want to speak correctly. Performing above that level isn't necessary, although it would of course be nice to be able to do so.

R: Why do you think that?

I: It's cooler that way, isn't it? We're getting into style here, but that's not important. In my mind, the level of English I have now is my limit. Neither my memory nor my motivation is as good as before. When I was attending meetings regularly, it was nothing but pain at the beginning. But I got used to these meetings, and I began to drive the changes on how meetings were operated. Towards the end, I felt that I was at an acceptable level, and maybe that was the ultimate goal for my English for the time being…of course it was not 100%.

R: What do you mean by 100%?

I: I think I'm comparing myself to counterparts because I realise that I won't be able to get to the native level. Take for example, the Norwegians I used to work with. Sure they had a bit of an accent, but they spoke English very well. On the other end of the scale, the Russians were not so great. I was much better than them.

R: @@@

I: I think I achieved the minimum level. If you ask me why I don't study English anymore, I think it's because I no longer feel the 'threat of danger' at work anymore. I'm not happy with my accent, but there's nothing more I can do. I don't feel any limitations because of it, so that's probably why I don't care as much as before. Of course it would be nice, but that's a luxury.

His story illustrates the following points. 1) He distinguishes between what he 'wants' to achieve to be totally satisfied and 'what he needs to have to handle his business tasks'. 2) When he evaluates his level of English, he uses two points of reference. One is the level at which his interlocutors use English, the other is the level that he perceives to be 'grammatically correct'. Throughout his interview, he often compares his English to that of his interlocutors, including both native and non-native speakers of English as a measurement to evaluate his own level. His perception of 'grammatically correct' English' is clearly different from the 'native standard' in his eyes. 3) His attitude towards English is not the same for each skill. For instance, he strongly feels that he needed to achieve 'grammatically correctness' in writing, but he takes a much more 'laid-back' approach when it comes to pronunciation and speaking in general. 4) He believes that 'grammatically correct' English is needed for 'reputation' and 'credibility' as a trustable partner in the business community. 5) Overall, he feels that he achieved the 'needed level' to handle his work, but this was not necessarily equivalent to being 'grammatically correct' at all times. He feels that his English is grammatically better than the majority of his Japanese colleagues, but not as good as some of the stronger non-native English speakers, such as Norwegians. However, as he feels he has attained a level of English that is 'acceptable', he does not feel the 'need' to acquire better English skills. Therefore, he no longer feels a need to 'study' English. He perceives his attitude towards 'improving' English today to be different from the attitude he had when he was originally struggling with the challenges of English communication.

Similarly, Bando continuously looked to improve his English to a certain extent, but he chose not to 'study' English anymore when he reached a level he was satisfied with.

Excerpt 81 - Bando

B: As I said, I think that my English skills are among the top level as a Japanese, non-native speaker. But if I compare my English to native speakers, it is significantly different. You know, my goal used to be to not receive compliments from native speakers, who would say that my English is 'good'…but I don't care so much anymore…I no longer feel that I need to improve my English...

R: You mean, you are content with your use of English for your job?

B: I think it's dependent on what you want to achieve…or what game you are playing…at this moment in time, my role is to deal with Japanese clients. If my game had nothing to do with Japanese clients, I would work harder on my English because I would feel a much greater need for improvement…I always feel that if one wants to achieve something, then it is possible…but for now, I don't feel like I'm encountering any issues, or have any objectives to achieve in English…

Bando and Itoh feel their current level is 'still far' from native English speakers with whom they deal at work. They are also clear that they are not trying to achieve the level they observe among native English users around them. They see a 'long distance' from their current level to the level they see among the native speakers. There is no automatic answer as to which point along this spectrum would allow Bando and Itoh to achieve their business goals to the best possible level, because that depends on their business goals, their assignment and their subjective judgment. Therefore, at some point, both Bando and Itoh made a subjective judgement that their English skills were 'good enough' for managing their business needs, and thus, they did not feel the need to 'study' English anymore. However, from their explanations, it is clear that they still feel that they have still not attained the level of English that they had hoped to when they were younger. Bando and Itoh's decision to accept their current level of English and not study further was not straightforward, but rather, filled with reservations.

When I translated the complex sense-making of participants, I looked for an English word which best conveyed what they had to say. I was not quite comfortable using the most common and widely used word, 'compromise' to translate their sense-making. When I listen or read that somebody 'compromises' in their learning trajectory, I feel a sense of the person in question being accused of 'laziness'. I wanted to use a word free from such 'nuances'. The most suitable word I found was 'satisficing', a term used in business management for optimal decision making. Satisficing has been used to explain a strategy to meet the criteria for adequacy rather than to take the optimal solution, as rational decision making to achieve given goals within the limits imposed by given conditions and constraints (Winter, 2000). In the context of learning capability, Winter argues that whether one has a certain capability is 'often a matter of degree'. Therefore 'there is generally no clear-cut or automatic answer to the question of when an organization should be expected to cut back its learning efforts and affirm that the desired capability has been achieved'.

Although Winter discusses 'satisficing strategy' in the context of 'organisational learning', his point is very similar to the core question that participants have in their mind. Many participants feel frustrated and believe there is further room for improvement, but they don't have an automatic answer of how far they want to improve their English, because there is no limit in learning a language. Individuals have to accept reality at some point rather than pursuing perfection. The resources that participants possess are limited, especially in terms of time and energy, and they have to 'satisfice' by deciding to pursue English to a particular level. Satisficing is made as a choice of individuals based on their preferences, values and/or utilities (Schwartz et al., 2002). I found it interesting to explore the rationale behind deciding on a particular level that participants might want to achieve.

The reasons and rationale for satisficing are explained differently by participants. In the case of Mori, he thinks that achieving his ideal level is unrealistic.

Excerpt 82 - Mori

M: I used to feel that I want to change my accent, but that's no longer true. In fact, now, I think that it's impossible.

R: So you don't think your accent causes any problems…

M: I mean, it is practically impossible to misunderstand rice for lice in our real life conversations. I can get through the work with my accent…

In this comment, Mori specifically discusses his accent, but he also says that he feels frustration when writing and speaking in English in general. He feels he has made significant improvements during his career in order to achieve his current level of English. He feels achieving the level of English which he wanted to achieve when he was younger is impossible, but he has become satisfied with his current level as it is sufficient for the practical communication needed in his position.

Erika is one of the participants who has been using English constantly over the past 10 years at work, and she speaks about how she makes sense of her use of English.

Excerpt 83 -Erika

E: When I went to the company's English lessons, I was told to improve my vocabulary and use more complex sentences by my teachers @@.

R: Who were those teachers?

E: I think they were Americans, Canadians, Australians…

R: Do you think what they said was right?

E: Hmm, well, they wanted me to speak more intellectually…they found my English to be, as if I were a junior high school student, I think.

R: Now that you are using English at work, do you think what they said is important?

E: Not so much. It is more important for your messages to be understood…I think that real-life use of English at work is different to what the teachers had in mind. Having said that, I still feel that it may be better to speak in the way that the teachers told me to.

R: Did you ever have any problems because of your English?

E: No, I didn't. My counterparts were mature enough, and they didn't react to how childish my English was@@@

The approach of her English teachers that she ought 'to speak more intellectual' is one which I believe is typically held by English teachers, especially native English teachers (Ehrenreich, 2009:

307, Jenkins, 2007). I have observed that English teachers are the people who are often most critical about 'grammatical correctness' and 'native like' expressions in Japan in a general debate about English. For instance, when the CEO of Toyota made a public apology in his 'broken English' (expression in The New York Times[9]), a well-known teacher of business English at Keio university criticised him[10]. He said that although his message could be understood, his 'broken English' is rather 'depressing', with the teacher questioning if being able to only speak such 'broken English' was acceptable for the CEO of the largest Japanese company and the largest automobile manufacturer in the world. I have repeatedly read this kind of criticism being placed by both native speakers and Japanese teachers, upon 'non-standard' or 'broken' English used by Japanese people in business and other fields. Therefore, it is no surprise to find that Erika is exposed to such criticisms at business English school at her company. Secondly, her reaction also represents some common feeling of 'fluctuation' among stories told by participants. On one hand, Erika feels that her English meets the needed level of English for her work. On the other hand, she still has a desire to achieve the English skills which may be appreciated by her English teachers. Erika feels that how she feels about this gap fluctuates over time. She may at one point feel very frustrated by her limitations, whilst at another time, she may be realistic and satisfied with her level of English. Whilst at work Erika accepts her level of English as it 'makes sense', she still wishes she could improve her English further.

8-3-4 Factors influencing satisficing

8-3-4-1 Low exposure to English

In the previous part, I discussed how participants choose to satisfice for a variety of reasons. In this part, I discuss further what factors influence the judgements of participants on what level of English is acceptable. Momo is an example of a BELF user who has used English for limited periods of her career only. Unsurprisingly, she places a relatively low priority on her level of English. In her 30 year career, her role has changed, and she has gone back and forth between domestic and international assignments. As a result, she has clear shifts between periods when she uses English regularly, and when she does not use English at all.

[9] 'Toyota chief Toyoda apologises for defects' news from The New York Times Feb 5, 2010, reported in Deccan Herald at http://www.deccanherald.com/content/50960/toyota-chief-toyoda-apologises-defects.html , accessed on 20th September, 2014
[10] 'CEO of Toyota was reported his English is 'broken'', an article on 'A notebook about business English' by Kiyoto Hinata, at http://eng.alc.co.jp/newsbiz/hinata/2010/02/post_673.html#comments, accessed on 20th September 2014.

Excerpt 84 - Momo

M: I haven't used English for almost 10 years. If I don't use English, then I become unable to speak it. I lose my courage to use English as well.

R: So if you were assigned to a role which requires English again, how would you feel?

M: Actually, my role has changed again recently. I may need to use English again in the near future and that does make me anxious @@. I really haven't used English at all recently… the only time I use English nowadays is on holidays abroad.

R: Did you feel pressured into using English?

M: Pressure? If I couldn't do something in English, then I couldn't do it at all.

Momo's story shows that she places low priority to English, because she thinks performing well at the domestic sales department is more appreciated by her firm and has more of an impact on her career. Furthermore, during some period of her career in the past, she had performed 'well enough' in the overseas business anyway with her English skills. How good English skills she has may have little relevance when her performance is evaluated by the management of this Japanese firm, as long as she achieves goals she was assigned. Her attitude towards English at the time of the interview is shown by her comment that 'English is a means to communicate' and the most important thing is how effectively she uses 'the limited means' she has. Therefore, her sense-making is 'what can't be done can't be done'. She is not sure if and how she will need to use English in future at this point, and thus, she has no plans to learn proactively. Her tone suggests she is a confident and successful business person. Even if she needs to use English as a senior manager, she believes that she can handle the situation.

Among the participants, two others, Suzuki and Yoshimi have had similar career paths that have involved regular switches from being on domestic assignments to being on international assignments. Therefore, the little exposure to English Suzuki and Yoshimi benefit from is not constant and limited. In the case of Suzuki, his perception about English is similar to Momo as he places a low priority on English skills in his career, because he feels that domestic business is more interesting for him. I find that Momo and Suzuki's cases are insightful for understanding the sense making of Japanese BELF users. The way in which Momo and Suzuki both value domestic over international careers may be widely shared by Japanese BELF users because they do not use English for the entirety of their career, and domestic business is often more important both at the firm level and from an individual perspective.

Their trajectory reminded me of a storm of criticism[11] towards a mayor of Tokyo when he 'tweeted' in English during his campaign to invite the 2020 Olympic Games to Tokyo. As he tweeted in non-standard English with 'grammatical errors', people said his level of English was 'shameful' for a mayor of one of the largest cities in the world. However, when I reflect on the trajectory of this mayor I see analogies with BELF users I discussed in this section. He had spent his entire career in domestic politics and journalism (he is an ex-journalist) successfully, and all of a sudden and unexpectedly, he needed to use English under the spotlight. What could he have done differently with his English? Was he expected to 'master' English when he was a student? Was he expected to keep learning English for few decades while he was achieving his domestic success? Or was he expected not to use English as a lingua franca to appeal to the sporting community in the world and to be quiet? Maybe he could have used a translator. Many critics do not see his linguistic repertoire as a reflection of his professional trajectory, but see his 'non-standard' English as the result of a lack of effort being put into studying the language.

I would also like to point out that Yoshimi's career shows that not all BELF users who have spent more time on domestic roles place low priority to English in their careers. He enjoyed his initial experiences working on an international assignment and he was determined to do so again because he felt that it was important for his firm to have somebody who could work effectively abroad. Even during his domestic assignment, Yoshimi was determined to proactively develop his English skills. His attitude resulted in him being called 'nerdy' by his colleagues, and he also saw himself as being 'unusual'. Nevertheless, his determination gave him competitive English skills, which eventually paid off when he later returned to an international assignment. He is proud of his achievement and he considers himself a unique and rare asset within his firm.

8-3-4-2 High exposure to English

In contrast to Momo and Suzuki, some participants are constantly exposed to English and consider competence of English to be a critical determinant of their success as business people. Fumie says that English is not only a tool for her career, but also a weapon (8-1-2-3 Excerpt 64). Unlike Erika, Itoh or Bando, Fumie was, and continues to be determined to fill in the gaps she sees in her English. Honda also believes in the value of high English competence at work. He said that his English skills are considerably better than those of the average employee in his firm, so I asked him how this influenced his work.

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[11] An article on Nikkan Gendai on 15th January 2013. Also at http://togetter.com/li/435450 which collect Tweets about mayor's English. Accessed on 20th September, 2014.

Excerpt 85 - Honda

R: If your English were at that level [the average level of the firm], would you be at a disadvantage?

H: For instance, the CEO of '[a well-known American high tech company in Japan]' said that [when people speak in English for business purposes], grammar is not relevant. When I heard his speech, he made lots of errors when using the past tense, and he struggled with tenses in general. If I made such simple errors in front of elites, such as people who went to Harvard, I'd feel ashamed…When you have business conversations with highly educated people…it is a shame…if your English is only to that level, you can't really have intellectual conversations.

His attitude toward BELF is rather similar to that of the English teacher who made an argument about Toyota CEO's 'broken English' in 8-3-3 (discussion about Excerpt 83). He perceives 'grammatically correct' English as necessary for business people like him, and he believes that he has achieved that level or is at least close to achieving that level. As discussed in 6-2-1 (Excerpt 1 & 2), Honda feels that he is appreciated within his firm for his English skills which means he is the go-to 'trouble shooter', who can handle complex and difficult negotiations in English. He has a strong belief that a high level of English, rather than the bare minimum, is necessary for handling complex business negotiations in English. He did not explain how he had developed such a belief. However, from his trajectory, his strong English skills seems to be a result of a positive spiral effect. He was motivated to learn English from a very young age, which enabled him to develop extensive English skills, which made him appreciate towards the value of having such a broad skillset. This in turn motivated him to study English even further. Furthermore, he clearly models his English on that of a 'highly educated native speaker of English'. Among the participants, Fumie seems to have experienced a similar spiral effect as discussed previously (8-3-4-2).

For Fumie and Honda, English is 'their' professional language and a dispensable tool and weapon. English is dominant, only because it is a communication tool for them to prove their professional competence. Especially in competitive global MNCs, as previously discussed (7-1-1 Excerpt 20; 8-1-2-3, Excerpt 64), BELF users need to communicate with native and non-native speakers of English from all over the world. As such, the ability to use English in a highly competent fashion is necessary to compete in professional communities. The BELF users who work in such global professional communities may overlap with the community of Asian professional workers I mentioned in Chapter 3-3. I suspect such an environment may be limited to a minor part of the business community, but it would be an interesting phenomenon to explore further in the future.

8-3-4-3 Decision to satisfice

The decision to satisfice is based on the subjective decision making of participants, and only participants themselves have enough knowledge to make such a judgement. Their decision-making could be influenced by a variety of factors. Ryoko's story demonstrates that the linguistic skill of interlocutors is one such factor.

Excerpt 86 - Ryoko

Re: What do you mean when you say that your colleagues are 'better' at communicating in English?

Ry: They speak with less hesitation…It's not like they speak while thinking like I do…they don't say things like Errr...or Ummm…They speak very smoothly…They speak English as if it is their mother tongue…

Re: You mean, you think it is a problem if you don't speak very smoothly?

Ry: It's not a problem…I think it wouldn't be a problem if I didn't care so much about it. But when I'm with these people, especially lots of them, and I'm making them wait while I speak English slowly…I feel uncomfortable…I can't help but feel that… And if that happens, I can't continue speaking slowly, or, I feel like I need to finish quickly, so, I end up rushing and finish without covering everything I wanted to say…I have this feeling. I experience these rather 'complex' emotions towards my colleagues when communicating in English…

Re: Is it a practical problem, or just a feeling?

Ry: I don't think it's a practical problem. But I do feel lost… emotionally. I think my colleagues are willing to listen…they would be willing to do so even if I stuttered...After all, I think I have this feeling of wanting to speak smoothly. I feel that other non-native speakers are managing to do so, so if they can manage… why not me?

Re: So you mean, if other non-native speakers also spoke slowly, you wouldn't care so much?

Ry: Exactly…but all non-native speakers in my company are genuinely that good. That's why I have continue to learn and want to get closer to their level.

Ryoko does not want to engage in satisficing. Even though her English skills are sufficient for the 'needs' of her job, she wants to further improve her English to a point where she would feel no sense of discomfort when surrounded by colleagues with very strong English skills. In this sense, incorporating a satisficing strategy is highly dependent on personal subjective sense-making, and BELF users can make an autonomous decision as to whether they wish to further improve their English.

Although the judgement as to whether a BELF user is engaging in satisficing is highly subjective, the analysis of participants' trajectories show that there are some shared characteristics among participants who are persistently attempting to improve their English skills relative to their peers, as summarised below.

BELF users may attempt to improve their English skills more persistently if:

- they use English constantly throughout their career
  (Fumie, Honda, Ryoko, Wakaya, Kaga, Gotoh, Daiwa)
- they use English with interlocutors who possess higher English competence
  (Fumie, Chika, Yoshimi, Ryoko and Itoh)
- they need to achieve complex and high stake business goals
  (Fumie, Chika, Kaga, Itoh, Kitami and Yoshimi)
- they consider their performance in English to be valued highly in their organisation
  (Fumie, Ryoko, Honda)
- they consider their English skills to serve as a competitive edge for their career
  (Fumie, Honda)

8-3-4-4 Changes in attitude over time

The satisficing point which a BELF user can change over time as the context in which they conduct their work changes. Chika's story provides one such example.

Excerpt 87 - Chika

R: You said that you felt that you needed to study, but what did you actually do?

C: At that time… I had a small child, and it was not my only responsibility. I also needed to continue with some domestic work, so I could not use my time to improve my English.

R: But you could pick up what people said, so your English was not that bad surely.

C: I mean, I wasn't too bad at English as a student, though I didn't use it at work until that assignment…so I used my English skills that I accumulated as a student.

R: So you were doing your job with your given English capacity… how did you feel about that?

C: I felt that it would be better if I could use English more freely, but I didn't have the time to make an effort. I knew that what I was achieving was different from what I felt I should be achieving, I knew that…but I didn't have the time to fill the gap. That was the position I was in.

At the time, as a mother in her late 30s with a young child, Chika could not allocate all her time and resources to learning English. Interestingly, when she was promoted to represent her firm in meetings in English later, by which time her child had grown up, she changed her attitude towards English and she started learning again. Currently, she is keen to improve her English again, because she is dealing with native English speakers daily in complex business ordeals. She provides an example of how BELF users' sense-making can change and develop over time. Many participants, such as Itoh, Bando, Mori and Adachi, allocated a significant amount of resources to improving their English skills during the earlier stages of their career, until they felt that their level of achievement in English communication was 'acceptable'. They were content when they reached a certain level, but they changed their attitude again later when they faced different challenges in English. In this respect, BELF users' satisficing strategy is not one-off or static, but rather, something that changes over time as users face new challenges.

8-3-5 Changes of English skills over trajectory

It is not possible to track the changes of a person's language skills accurately because, as linguistic researchers have repeatedly pointed out, there is no such method. Still, I am very interested in grasping how participants develop English skills throughout their business career over the period of a few decades. As an attempt to gain insight into the perceived development of participants' English skills, while still acknowledging the limitations to accuracy and representativeness and maintaining consistency across samples, I asked participants to reflect upon how they perceive their English skills to have changed within their career. Specifically, at the end of the interviews, whenever possible, I asked participants to evaluate their English skills when they graduated school. I asked them to evaluate numerically, the level of English at the point of starting their career, placing a value of 100 to their current skills. While recognising that this is a subjective view rather than absolute fact, the data may still serve as a rough indicator of participants' perceptions on their progress of English skills throughout their business career.

Overall, most participants say that their English skills have changed significantly throughout their business career. Participants who have used English constantly for long periods tend to evaluate that their English skills have developed the most. Itoh gives a score of 30 at the point of graduating from university, 50 following his two year stay in Singapore, and 60 to 70 after the completion of his MBA. The rest of his improvement came from attending multinational meetings.

Ryoko rates her English skills after graduating from high school at 20, and gives 60 for after her training in the USA. The remaining 40 was developed while she was working at her MNC for over 20 years.

Fumie scores her English skills at the point of entry into the company at zero. She says that in her firm, everybody uses English daily, and accumulates experiences over years as layers in their English skills. As a result, her English communication skills have changed significantly throughout her career. Fumie was already a very confident user when she was a student, having an *EIKEN* grade 1, a standardised English test grade in Japan, claiming to be the equivalent to IELTS 7.0 or above. Yet, to my surprise, she gave herself zero for her English skills at the time. Her comment shows that she regards English skills typically evaluated by such standardised tests to be insufficient for business communication, serving as a mere starting point for her as a BELF user.

Kaga gives a score of 40 to the level of English skills that he possessed when he graduated, whereas his current score is 80, down from the time when he was in the USA, as his ability to respond quickly in English was much higher at the time.

Gotoh feels that his English skills in conversation were zero when he graduated from university. Nevertheless, he could use English at a minimum level in Sweden because he had one-month's training before he went. His English skills improved drastically during his year in Sweden. However, they dropped when he was in Mexico since he was using Spanish. Then, his English skills improved again when he stayed in Vietnam for two years. After returning to Japan, he feels that his listening skills dropped, because he uses English mainly only for reading.

Daiwa also feels that his English skills in conversation were zero when he graduated, because he did not study it much at university. He says that his 'competence in English grammar' was built up during high school, and he still considers his conversation skills to be 'not very good'.

Kitami says that his English skills were 'absolutely bad', but as a result of his experience of using English at work, his English improved.

Chika gives a score of 20 to her English skills at the end of university, but her skills increased drastically in the 10 years following the beginning of her English usage at work, at around the age of 40. It is impressive to see how much she has perceived her English to have improved since her late 30s.

Okada said that he had already developed 80% of his linguistic skills, such as grammar, by the time he had graduated from university, but he had to develop pragmatic skills and his work specific use of English later through experiences at work. He revealed to me that he sees linguistic skills and pragmatic skills as being different.

Finally, Bando says his English skills at university were zero, or even had a negative impact on his overall English ability, because later on in his career, he had a hard time trying to change his very heavy Japanese accent that he learned when he was a junior high school student.

Overall, I was surprised to observe how many participants gave such low scores to their English skills at the time of graduation from university, compared to their current ability. This confirms that most participants regard a significant improvement in their English skills to be learnt from the experiences at work, which, as a result, has made a significant impact on their use of English. In fact, the changes from this learning process are perceived to be so significant that many participants score their initial skills up to the post-undergraduate studies level to be below 50% of what they have now. This perception strongly suggests that English skills at the beginning of their career is only their starting point, and that there is still huge potential for developing their skills significantly, if they feel that they need to do so.

Throughout my discussion in the past three chapters, I have showcased the variety of Japanese participants' stories about their trajectories of using English, and such stories support Blommaert's claim that 'our real language reflects our own histories and those of the communities in which we spent our lives' (2010: 103). I have also discussed that their English repertoires are reflective of how they make sense of their use of English.

In other words, BELF users' challenges in their business communication are often reflections of their 'truncated' linguistic repertoires in English, which are often reflections of individuals' different historical trajectories, their business career and how they make sense of their use of English. The challenges faced by participants are also a reflection of being raised and conducting business in Japan, a monolinguistic society in which access to English is rather limited compared to other countries.

Based on the analysis of stories told by participants, I believe that I have demonstrated that researchers should not narrowly look at individual BELF users' linguistic challenges and issues as a result of individual users' efforts, education or linguistic attitude. Instead, researchers should carefully consider individual BELF users' challenges situated in a broader picture in a globalised word as well as reflection of their trajectory of language use.

Conclusion

In this chapter I analysed the participants' trajectories of their use of English at work, from their emic point of view, focusing on how their needs for English changed over their career, to how they learned to handle their changing needs at work, to how they made sense of their English skills in their business contexts. Most importantly, I confirm that the trajectory of Japanese BELF users is different from person to person, and their use of English is situated in their professional field, their career path, their organisations, their positions and roles. In such a variety of trajectories, participants have ownership to decide how they deal with their own use of English in business, based on their subjective judgements on their needs and performance of English at work, and their values attached to their English skills. A clear common trait of their trajectories is that their English skills change over their careers. Often, these changes reflect their string of experiences of using English in their day to day communication, and their efforts of learning to meet the challenges when using their English skills to perform their business goals. At the same time, their English skills could go down if they are not in continuous contact with the language.

The participants' most significant learning seems to come from their own reflective learning from their experiences throughout their use of English. In this sense, the participants' stories illustrate that BELF 'users' are also lifelong 'learners' (similar illustration of German managers in Ehrenreich, 2009: 146) of English at work. Their changes in English communication skills refer mainly to pragmatic skills. Most participants perceive their English business skills to have developed significantly while using English, and their trajectory of their use of English is a long journey, composed of continuous learning efforts, as well as forgetting and satisficing, reflecting their business contexts, business career, and how they make sense of their use of English. This means that throughout this long trajectory, their English skills change over time. More specifically, this change is not linear, but rather, a long learning curve, consisting of steep, slow, flat, and even downward sections.

This is the end of the three chapters where I discuss the participants' stories to explore the trajectory of BELF users. Based on the discussion in these three chapters, I conclude my thesis in the next chapter.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

Introduction

The final chapter consists of four parts. Firstly, I summarise the findings of the research and answer questions which were raised in Chapter 1. Secondly, the limitations of this research are stated along with suggestions for future research. I then I discuss the contributions for academic knowledge about business communion and implications for education in Japan. The chapter concludes with closing comments of my own reflection of the research project.

9-1 Answers to the research questions

In this section, I answer the research questions stated in Chapter 1, by exploring and summarising my discussion in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. By answering the research questions, I present my findings and analyses throughout the study to capture the voice of Japanese BELF users and to understand their emic view about their use of English in the global spread of English in the business contexts.

9-1-1 Research question 1

- What challenges related to their 'use of English' (e.g. those arising from their linguistic repertoire) have they encountered to achieve their business goals and what needs have they perceived?

The thematic analysis of participants' narratives revealed that Japanese BELF users have faced a variety of challenges in using English, reflecting upon their situated variables such as their characteristics of business practice, the norms of organisations they belong to and their career path, as well as their values in their business career.

The initial stage of starting to use English at work is often perceived as being challenging by many participants because this is the transition period from being a learner of English at school to a user of English at work. The transition can be broken down into two factors. One is a transition from a learner to a user, and the other is a transition from in a school context to a business context. The former could happen at any time when participants start using English, and indeed, some participants became an established English user before they started working as they used English extensively as students. In this transition to a user, physiological difficulties seem to be significant for participants. The frequently told challenges of this transition include accepting their linguistic realities, starting to use English within their limited skills, accumulating experiences of using English to build up confidence, and learning how to repair communication breakdowns. The other factor, the transition from being in a school context to a business context, requires participants to learn professional vocabularies and expressions shared by members of the business community they join.

After they became independent and skilful BELF users, they still face a variety of challenges as they keep using English at work. Challenging experiences told by the participants include participating in meetings, writing in English in business forms, cooperating with low productivity, and preventing making mistakes in English. Participants need to deal with these challenges as they encounter them during their career. Their 'needs' to deal with these challenges are characterised by a variety of pragmatic skills to handle their specific situations. For instance, one participant who frequently attended international meetings had different 'needs' during different stages of her career, such as to become able to express her opinions, to co-construct her opinions while interacting with other participants, and to contribute to develop flow of discussions during these meetings. Throughout their business career, participants use English with a variety of interlocutors including colleagues, partners, and clients spread all over the world in order to achieve their business goals. Consequently, participants have needs to use English as a business lingua franca with both native and non-native speakers with a wide range of English competence.

9-1-2 Research question 2

- How do they deal with these challenges, what do they think of their achievements, and how do they make sense of their experiences?

Over the course of pursuing their goals of business communication, participants face a variety of challenges, but in general, they somehow manage to find a way to deal with these challenges as time goes by. Thus, even if the participants have had some communication breakdowns and/or misunderstandings when they perform their business communications, such issues are not perceived as being fatal or major problems. This is because participants can find ways to repair these breakdowns and ultimately achieve their business goals to a certain level. Participants often dealt with challenges by learning new English skills from experiences of using English.

Participants' stories also reveal that there are several factors which may influence perceived difficulties in communication among business people. Economic power, superiority of information and sharing a goal, along with power of language, are among the influential factors, which are not mutually exclusive, exhaustive or static. These powers/abilities need to be perceived by interlocutors to be influential. At the same time, however, many participants also experience feelings of 'frustrations' and of 'I could have done better', because the majority of participants share feelings that their English communication competence is somehow 'limited', especially compared to what they perceive to be possible in Japanese, their mother tongue.

It was also confirmed by participants that they utilise their linguistic repertories holistically by using both English and Japanese interactively in a complex manner (Chapter 7-3-2). Japanese BELF users tend to use only the Japanese language when they communicate with Japanese colleagues and clients without the involvement of non-Japanese people. This makes Japanese BELF users use the Japanese language interactively with English when they pursue their business goals even in BELF communication. In particular, participants who work in a Japanese company frequently need to go back and forth between two quite different 'business environments'; one is with Japanese people communicating in Japanese based on Japanese business practices, and the other is with non-Japanese speakers communicating in English based on non-Japanese business practices. For many participants, to be an effective BELF user, it is critical to be able to bridge the two different environments because BELF users are often in a 'critical points' which connect two different environments. The 'bridging' involves complex issues much more than simple translation of two languages, and many participants perceive the skill to be indispensable for BELF users.

9-1-3 Research question 3

- How have their challenges, needs, and dealings related to their 'use of English' changed over time?

Participants' business goals and tasks have changed over time and space, and more importantly as participants progress throughout their career. Participants' needs for their BELF communication change over time accordingly. The variety of stories told by participants illustrate that as they develop their career and bear higher responsibilities, many participants perceive the nature of communication and the required skills for such communication to be increasingly complex and involving higher risks. In order to perform such BELF communication to achieve their business goals, many participants have learned the necessary skills through their experiences of using English. However, some participants indicated that they did not take such an approach. For instance, some participants also utilise other non-linguistic means such as using an interpreter and getting help from native speakers, so that they can fill in the gaps in their English skills. Based on the analysis of the process of participants' sense-making of their use of English, I argued that participants often employ a 'satisficing' strategy at certain points within their business career. This strategy involves users accepting their 'current' level of English, rather than pursuing the level they 'want to have'. This strategy is taken as a way to produce the best solution within the limited time and resources in a given situation of actual practices, depending on their goals, the business environment in which they are situated, and most importantly, participants' values towards English skills for their business career. On the other hand, some participants take pride on their English skills, which serve as their 'weapon' that enables them to do work in English better than others, and pursue their life-long learning process of achieving towards a 'desired level' of English. Such decisions are a result of highly subjective sense making of each participant. Their 'satisficing' strategy is not one-off or static during their career, as their sense making can change and develop over time.

In relation to this question, it becomes clear that participants who use English regularly perceived their English skills to have changed a great deal from when they finished education. From their stories, it was also confirmed that pragmatic skills are considered especially important to become a more effective user of BELF.

9-2 Other major findings

Although these findings were not directly related to the research questions I originally set, I felt that they may nonetheless provide a contribution to advancing ELF and BELF research at a theoretical level.

9-2-1 Criteria for communication success and target competence

The participants' narratives confirm that a common concern for BELF users is achieving communication goals in business, which in most cases involved fulfilling the their business needs through BELF communication. In this research, participants also shared a pragmatic attitude towards the use of English to achieve their goals (as discussed Chapter 3-2-2-1). However, their perception on what kind of 'English' they need is far from agreed upon. Some participants, especially in the field of engineering and scientific research, outline 'intelligibility', or passing 'information' without misunderstanding as their main concern, and therefore, they typically argue that simple and easy-to-understand expressions are critical for successful business communication. Their attitude towards English is in line with most ELF researchers' arguments (e.g. Seidlhofer, 2011: 18). However, some BELF users in this study held a strong belief that they needed to achieve more than just 'intelligibility' to fulfil their business goals, although most did not go as far as to say they want to attain a 'native level' of English. More specifically, their interests beyond 'intelligibility' included persuasiveness, communicating nuances, motivating others and perception of others. At a linguistic level, participants repeatedly noted how grammatical correctness is often perceived as an indicator of their 'reliability' as a businessperson in their business community.

It is therefore, arguably an over-simplification to suggest that the objective of BELF users is to reach a level of communication that assures 'intelligibility'. Instead, it can be said that (B)ELF users decide their target level of English by making sense of the context and through assessing the value they attach to communication in English. As a result, the participants' target competence level of English varies widely and changes over time. Therefore, rather than using a dichotomy of 'intelligibility' and 'native norms' to discuss BELF users' target level of competence, researchers need to realise that a user's target level of competence can vary across an entire spectrum.

9-2-2 Characteristics of Japanese BELF users

The study reveals that Japanese BELF users' competence in BELF communication, contexts, attitude, and individual values differ significantly, and as such, it is inappropriate to talk of 'typical' or 'average' Japanese BELF users. In fact, this study suggests that it is difficult to pinpoint 'typical' characteristics of BELF users given that there are so many variables that affect BELF communication amongst such users.

A common claim amongst researchers is that there exists a 'cooperative attitude' in BELF communication (e.g. Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010). Although this is indeed confirmed by many participants in my study, they are often situated in contexts whereby they share business goals with interlocutors. In addition, the narratives of participants indicate that BELF communication can sometimes be uncooperative or 'antagonistic', especially when there is a conflict of interest (as mentioned by Ehrenreich, 2010, Seidlhofer 2011; 49). Though such situations could be relatively rare, they could be 'critical moments' for BELF users, and as such they cannot be overlooked. This is one example that suggests that pigeonholing BELF users and their communication to particular characteristics is unsuitable. Another example would be the suggestion that BELF users typically 'let it pass' (Firth, 1996). Although often mentioned as a characteristic of ELF communication, no participants in this study perceived it to be common or appropriate practice in their business environments[12].

Many participants' stories also seem to exhibit rather contrasting perceptions or feelings about English from those of German managers discussed in BELF studies in Germany (e.g.

[12] Tsuchiya and Handford (2014) also find that not 'let[ting] it pass' is important in BELF communication

Ehrenreich 2009. 2010, discussion in 3-2-3). The majority of participants in this study share the perception of German managers that English is indispensable for their cross border business and that they have been able to successfully achieve their business tasks in English. However, many participants have a different perception how English was not ‘something so natural’, and that in contrast to the case of German managers, the participants in this study frequently expressed feelings of ‘tension’, ‘anxiety’ and ‘frustration’ at having to use English in their business environments (8-3-2). I do not claim that this is a characteristic shared amongst Japanese BELF users, but instead, I see this as a demonstration of how attitudes to English can vary widely even amongst BELF users who seem to be successful in their communication. Although I need to be cautious not to overgeneralise, I consider it plausible that Japanese BELF users who have grown up in, and been educated in Japan, rather than in other countries, are more prone to feeling such tensions, given that Japan is more ‘monolingual’ than many European countries where multiple languages are used in daily life.

9-2-3 Beyond the dichotomy of native and non-native speakers

At the beginning of this thesis, I wrote that I would look into both the positive and negative sides of BELF users’ experiences, and I demonstrated that BELF in ‘real practice’ cannot be described by emphasising only the ‘positive’ side (i.e. Seidlhofer 2011:13, 49). While I highly appreciate ELF researchers’ significant achievement of demonstrating that non-native English speakers can communicate successfully in English exploiting their linguistic and non-linguistic resources, such findings do not mean that anybody ‘can’ use English in that manner, nor does it mean they do so without any ‘costs’. I have discussed that, at least among Japanese participants, some do not successfully become BELF users, and therefore avoid or reject using English despite their needs to communicate with non-Japanese speakers in their professional life. Furthermore, successful Japanese BELF users become successful in English communication typically only after having put in an extensive effort into improving their English competence, in order to compensate for ‘costs’ such as low productivity, the risk of making ‘mistakes’ and frustration. Furthermore, they have to creatively use other linguistic and non-linguistic resources to overcome challenges. Because of such ‘extras’ they have to bare when communicating in English, many BELF users in this study consider themselves to be at a disadvantage to other BELF users who are more competent at English, and therefore, do not need to shoulder the burden of the aforementioned ‘extras’. Such feelings have often been considered practical or functional business problems, rather than merely as issues with ‘ideological meta-level discussions’ (Seidlhofer 2011: 22). The participants’ belief that less competent users of English often have a relative disadvantage against more competent English users even in (B)ELF communication must be recognised, even though there may be offsetting factors (as discussed in Chapter 7-2-5 and 7-2-6).

In the above statement, I used 'more' or 'less' 'competent' users of English, rather than native and non-native English users, as I find it increasingly inappropriate to use the dichotomy of native and non-native English speakers in this field of research. It is often argued that labelling English speakers as either 'native speakers' or 'non-native speakers' can no longer be used to accurately illustrate real practices of ELF. Although much of the focus has been on the classification of 'native speakers', I would like to raise a serious issue with categorising 'non-native speakers' as if they were all alike or shared common characteristics.

Premises such as 'non-native speakers are successful in BELF communication' or 'enjoy the privilege' may be true for some non-native English users, yet these suggestions are problematic given that they are not applicable to all non-native English users. The use of the label of 'non-native speakers' may therefore be misleading. Furthermore, it must be noted that the competence of individual BELF users change significantly over the course of their careers, and the experiences they face and their sense-making also change accordingly. Another major problem with bracketing 'non-native speakers' together is that they depict 'new' BELF users as having similar characteristics to those with an abundance of experience of using English throughout their business career. Three out of four people in the world are 'non-speakers' of English (Crystal, 2012), but given the growing need for English in order to participate in global communication, many of the previously non-speaking population have faced a sudden need to use English, as told by participants. Therefore, it would be oversimplified to neglect this cohort, or classify them as being the same as already experienced users.

Although I am not proposing the use of a specific alternative to the term 'non-native' users, it emerged from participants' stories that looking into the relative strength of English communication skills in one's 'linguistic repertoire as a whole' would be an area to explore further. For some BELF users, English is the strongest language (L1) in their linguistic repertoire in business communication, so it would not 'dilute' their linguistic competence in function, regardless of their native or non-native status. On the contrary, the majority of the participants in this study feel they can perform in English at less than their 'maximum capacity', which they could realise if they were to communicate in Japanese, their L1.

Finally, I would like to add that distinguishing ELF and EFL, as has often been discussed by researchers (e.g. Jenkins et al., 2011), may not always be straightforward from Japanese BELF users' point of view. Some situations of English communication told by the participants could fit clearly into either one of ELF or EFL, but some others fall into a 'grey area' between them. Given the diversity and fluidity of business communication and complexity in globalisation, the distinction between ELF and EFL has become increasingly unclear and ambiguous when applied to real business practices. While the distinction between ELF and EFL may be important in the conceptualisation of the ELF phenomenon, such a distinction may need to be questioned from 'non-native' English users' point of view.

In summary, while the phenomenon of ELF has been increasingly researched in a variety of contexts by researchers of holding a variety of viewpoints, a common finding shared and repeatedly mentioned amongst such research has been the diversity and fluidity of ELF communication. As such, ELF ought to be seen as a 'fluid', 'contingent' (e.g. Jenkins, 2015), 'dynamic' (e.g. Dewey, 2007), 'complex' (e.g. Baird, Baker, & Kitazawa, 2014, Kitazawa, 2013) and 'diverse' (e.g. Cogo, 2012) phenomenon. This thesis provides a strong support that (B)ELF communication is deeply situated, and observable features of one case cannot be easily generalised as a rule of BELF. Instead, densely contextual descriptions and analysis of reoccurring patters with discussion of their needs and causes are critical to capture the (B)ELF phenomenon from a global perspective[13].

9-2-4 Reconciliation of participants' practice with the multilingual framework

As discussed in the literature review of the theoretical framework of multilingualism in Chapter 2-2, I aimed to look at Japanese BELF users' linguistic resources as a whole, rather than English as an individual language resource. This interest led me to listen to various stories on how Japanese interacts with each participant's use of English. Such stories are from situations such as using English and Japanese interactively in order to get work done (e.g. Excerpt 54 Wakaya), bridging the two different language environments of Japanese and English (e.g. Excerpt 53, Gotoh and Excerpt 55, Kaga) and simulating the consequences of changing different 'logics' of Japanese to English when one writes in English (Chapter 7-3-2 Mori). Furthermore, 'performance in Japanese' is often used as a benchmark to evaluate the speed/quality of work in English (e.g. Chapter 7-1-5), and Japanese is used to perform critical thinking when reading in English (e.g. Excerpt 25, Itoh). It is interesting to point out that participants only tell of such a presence of Japanese in their English communication when asked what language they use for specific tasks. They seem to share a feeling that the presence of Japanese in their English

[13] I acknowledge that a brief conversation with Jan Blommaert in a conference 'Exploring Ethnicity: Diversity in Language, Nation, and Identity' at University of Manchester, on 23rd April 2015 contributed to my discussion here.

communication practices is something so natural that they do not need to mention it if it is not specifically asked for (e.g. Excerpt 25 and Excerpt 54)[14].

Such stories clearly confirm Cook's argument (Cook n.d.) that 'someone who knows two or more languages is a different person from a monolingual and so needs to be looked at in their own right'. In other words, the application of multilingual 'perspectives' in this research led me to demonstrate that Japanese BELF users' use of English in practice is actually different from that of monolingual users of English. The stories further support Yanase's argument that Japanese people who have been educated in Japanese exclusively in Japan cannot be free from the influence of Japanese, and Japanese is utilised in their deep thinking and intellectual discussion (2009). It should also be noted that BELF users in this research often talked about Japanese linguistic resources as a 'supplement' or 'complement' to their English linguistic resources, such as using Japanese in critical thinking when reading or listening in English (e.g. Excerpt 25 and Excerpt 53). In other cases, BELF users told of their use of Japanese as a 'system in their business community' or an effective strategy, to deal with the challenges in the use of English as a lingua franca in global business (e.g. Excerpt 54 and Excerpt 57). To summarise, the participants' stories illustrate that the Japanese language resource is often used to make their English communication more effective, rather than less effective, in their bilingual business communication.

Among the multilingual research being conducted outside of Japan, most studies are situated in multilingual societies where multiple languages are used in their daily social lives (Chapter 2-2). Therefore, the researchers often report mixed uses of several languages based on the discourses they have collected from their fieldwork in multilingual settings (e.g. Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010; Blommaert, 2010). In this regard, I did not hear of any stories of mixed uses of English and Japanese when speaking with other people. This may be because Japanese BELF users tend not to mix English and Japanese when speaking with others, although they may use English and Japanese interactively in different phases of communication or in a mixed manner within their minds. Possible explanations include Japanese English users perceiving English and Japanese as being used in distinctively different ways, because Japanese is overwhelmingly used in 'only Japanese' settings, while English is used only when at least one person does not understand Japanese, often in non-Japanese environments (detailed discussion in Chapter 7-3). However, more precise investigation may be needed to conclude this point. In a situation where

[14] I acknowledge that among the participants, only Kaga told that he feels it annoying that when he tries to think in English, some ideas pop up in Japanese in his mind. He feels this hinders his stream of thinking in English.

everyone participating in communication is comfortably bilingual in Japanese and English, they may be able to mix Japanese and English. Since I did not ask specifically about such situations and did not listen to the discourses in such occasions, I am unable to conclude. I am quite interested in further investigating some conversations such as Wakaya in Excerpt 54 which discuss the development of English documents among Japanese bilingual engineers who are actually use English in the projects, or Gotoh in Excerpt 53 having a wrap-up meetings with bilingual Japanese staff to discuss a teleconference they had just had in English and to write a summary in English. In such 'all-bilingual' situations, Japanese BELF users may actually mix English and Japanese when speaking. This could be an area for further investigation in order to understand how Japanese is used in interaction with their English by Japanese BELF users.

In summary, this research has provided strong support that the use of English by Japanese people needs to be reviewed using a multilingual framework, looking at their linguistic resources as a whole rather than isolating their English communication from their Japanese linguistic resources. Investigating Japanese people's use of English with this holistic viewpoint would enable researchers to understand their use of English in a more 'realistic' manner, and may provide more practical implications for English education policies for Japanese people.

9-3 Limitations and further research

9-3-1 Characteristics of participants

It is important to state that participants in this study clearly share characteristics that could be said to define the elite minority among BELF users in Japan. They are leaders of Japanese global business, and may be significantly influential, but they are by no means representative of Japanese BELF users from a macro point of view. Therefore, it is not possible to generalise findings in this study to Japanese BELF users in the wider population.

The participants are a minority among the Japanese BELF users because they are both successful BELF users and successful in their business career. After I conducted several interviews, I realised that my condition of recruiting participants who are 'Japanese BELF users with solid experience of using BELF' has automatically narrowed down my participant pool to BELF users who are considered 'successful' by others. It may be because only successful performers in using BELF can accumulate further experiences of doing so. If one's performance in the use of BELF is considered too poor, one may not be assigned a similar job again. As I discussed in Chapter 6-4, it is clear that some participants have encountered BELF users who were not 'successful' and left their assignment. Story of such participants may be completely different from those in this study. BELF users in this study can also be considered as being a minority in Japan from a different perspective. In Chapter 1-2, I presented quantitative data to show that only 6% of the adult population in Japan consider themselves as being able to use English (Figure 1), and participants in this study must fall in this minority group among Japanese business people. It is also clear from participants' stories that most of the participants are successful professional business people, who were typically educated in highly recognised universities, work in well-known companies and have been promoted to managerial positions. During the process of analysis and writing the thesis, I decided to focus on these professional business people as the core participants and left out other types of participants. It was a necessary decision to make the discussion coherent in this thesis, but this clearly contributes to a concentration of a particular group of people.

An immediate opportunity for further research is to study and explore the rest of the participants interviewed for this study. These people are BELF users who are engaged in more administrative roles, and they tend to work as a language specialist assisting professional Japanese business people who are less skilled in using BELF. Such a study may provide a significantly different view of BELF in Japanese firms. Similarly, I see a wide range of opportunities to extend this research framework to other types of language users and eventually making comparisons among different types of users of English in the global context. Within the field of the BELF context, the participants could be targeted with a more specific focus based on participants' characteristics, such as less-elite business people, or those who may consider themselves as being less-successful BELF users. Within the field of the professional use of ELF, focus could shift to other specific fields of occupations such as academia, language teachers and politicians. Beyond the scope of the professional use of English, I also think that this research framework could bring unique insights by targeting Japanese people who use English for completely different purposes such as Japanese ELF users who marry non-Japanese speakers and use English as a lingua franca in their family. This research methodology could be, of course, effective to explore ELF users of any nationalities.

9-3-2 Perceptions

It is also necessary to examine the limitations of studying only perceptions and 'internal sense-making' of participants, without first-hand knowledge about participants' everyday English language practices. First of all, it was my original intention to focus on the emic view of participants, because I felt that there was a lack of information on etic views of English users in mainstream research. I also felt that some researchers' 'interpretations' of users' emic views, such as their 'sense making' or motivations, were not fully convincing. The aim of this research is to fill in this gap. Therefore, the lack of access to real practices of participants' use of BELF is not necessarily taken as a shortcoming, but rather, a unique aspect which can be explored in future research. I hope this aim of focusing on the emic view of participants being expressed through their own voice, has enabled this thesis to provide valuable insights and bring conceptual depth to fill in the gaps of existing research.

In this respect, I see a wide scope of opportunities to explore BELF users' actual practice of their use of English, to be complementary to the current study. Discourse, ethnographic, longitudinal, or shadowing (Louhiala-Salminen, 2002) research of Japanese BELF users would deepen the knowledge obtained from this study. However, at the same time, I am doubtful of whether such studies could be feasible, especially in Japanese firms where I feel that management tends to be conservative when asked to provide access to outside researchers.

9-4 Implications and contributions

9-4-1 Academic contributions

This study is complementary to more traditional research, especially business discourse study that specifically focuses on the observable use of spoken and written languages in the business context. By providing knowledge of the un-observable 'emic view' of BELF users, this research can particularly contribute to three areas of academic knowledge about communication in business contexts. Firstly it provides the emic view of participants and their internal sense making behind how and why their observed actions are taken. For instance, my discussion of challenges in participating in meetings provides their emic view on why participants find it difficult to take turns in business meetings, and how they deal with such challenges. Participating in meetings have often been discussed among BELF/business communication research, but studies on users' internal sense making, judgement, and feeling have been very limited (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010; Ehrenreich, 2010). This study also contributes to explaining participants 'sense-making' about their 'accepting their English skills in ELF communication' (Ehrenreich, 2010; Seidlhofer, 2011) by analysing the users' own words. In addition to such internal sense making, this study contributes to clarifying the hidden cost of the spread of BELF, especially for the Japanese participants who have relatively limited access to English due to their sociolinguistic background.

This study also contributes to understanding BELF users' experiences of 'critical moments' from both a business trajectory and learning trajectory viewpoint. From the business point of view, access to real business communication is notoriously difficult in the field of business communication research, and even if access is granted, data is often limited to conversations involving rather 'unimportant' topics (discussed in Chapter 3-2-3). In this respect, by listening to narratives of Japanese BELF users who play key roles in their global business, this study successfully seeks to provide an insider's view of the 'critical moments' in business communication. The 'critical moments' in business refer to the negotiation of highly confidential, complex and conflicting situations in business contexts which are critically important for BELF users to conduct their business. For instance, in stories told by Itoh (Chapter 7-1-1, Excerpt 23), Daiwa (Chapter 7-2-3, Excerpt 46), Kaga (Chapter 8-1-2, Excerpt 59 and 8-3-2, Excerpt 77), and Chika (Chapter 8-3-2, Excerpt 78) , their experiences of critical moments in business are explained with their sense making. Additionally, their stories also help develop our understanding of 'critical moments' (Pennycook, 2004) in participants' trajectory of use of English as I discussed in Chapter 4-3-4. Many stories are told by participants because they represent moments when they discovered or realised something new about their use of English. In the case of Ryoko (Chapter 6-5-1 Excerpt 15) and Wakaya (Chapter 8-2-3 Excerpt 67), they vividly illustrated how they discovered the pleasure of using a new language as their 'critical moment' in their trajectory of language learning and using. Because only the users can identify and tell such 'critical moments', they are often difficult to capture through other methods.

Providing an insight into the long-term trajectory of BELF users and their changes over the trajectory also contributes to mainstream research. Most research aims to capture snapshots of their use of languages, and the discussion of the trajectory of BELF users have been little explored.

Finally, I have provided some comparisons of characteristics of various Japanese BELF users. Since most of the BELF studies in the past are case studies of one or a few corporations, focusing on the micro perspective of the BELF community, a larger picture of BELF practices has not yet been presented to my knowledge. The comparisons made in this research are on a very limited scale and provides only limited knowledge on the difference of BELF users. However, by analysing narrative of individuals with variety of background, I have demonstrated there is no 'typical' or 'representative' Japanese BELF users. I believe that this study still be able to provide enough discussion that conventional research cannot due to their generalisation of the 'Japanese English user' or 'Japanese BELF user'.

9-4-2 Implications for government policies and higher education

As discussed in Chapter 1-2, turning young Japanese people into competent BELF users is widely considered to be one of the most important goals, if not the most, for Japanese English education, especially within the Japanese higher education system. From this study, I would like to make five suggestions which are often neglected in government policy for English education in general and for higher education.

Firstly, I would like to stress that the use of English for BELF users entails a lifelong process of developing English skills, and the Japanese education system needs to train its students to learn English proactively from their own experience, rather than to learn passively in the classroom. Thus, role of the Japanese English education is not limited to teach 'knowledge' of English to students, but extends to train students with skills to learn and use English independently and prepare for further development throughout their career as ELF users.

Secondly, this study confirms that pragmatic skills are especially critical to achieving their (business) communication goals, and developing such skills should be considered as an indispensable part of students' English learning. Examples of the pragmatic skills raised as being important from participants are communicative skills for negotiation, participating in meetings, and repairing communication breakdowns. In relation to the importance of pragmatic skills, I would like to emphasise the limitations and weaknesses of using of TOEIC as a measurement of BELF, as discussed in the previous chapters. Although I understand that TOEIC is widely used in Japan because there is no other simple and easy alternative, standard tests should be used with a clear recognition of its limitations. Current trends of over-emphasising TOEIC scores may mislead potential/existing BELF into thinking that that skills for TOEIC are the main, if not, the only English skills they have to develop. In other words, there is the danger that people take a high score to be an automatic guarantee of successful communication in BELF situations. The current study illustrates clearly that this is not the case for participants.

Thirdly, this study provides empirical support that English teaching for Japanese students should not be completely isolated from the use of Japanese. It is clear from participants' stories that for most Japanese BELF users, the use of English in real life is not isolated from the use of Japanese. For BELF users, it is often necessary to effectively use the two languages interactively to achieve their communication goals. Recent emphasis by the Japanese government on 'English only' teaching neglects such realities of Japanese BELF users. Instead, I suggest offering selective and strategic uses of both 'English only' and 'English-Japanese bilingual' teaching when teaching English so that students can develop an understanding and the skills to explore their multilingual repertories holistically to achieve their communication goals.

Furthermore, this study shows that it would be effective to train students to become 'users' of English. According to the participants' stories students may find it useful to 1) accept the reality of their limited English skills and to communicate in English utilising their limited linguistic resources, 2) push themselves to use English even if they are not content with the way they use the language, and 3) accumulate experience of using English, in order to develop confidence of using the language. In other words, it is essential that school curriculums include programs to encourage students to make a conscious transition from a 'learner' to a 'user'. Such programs may involve exposing students to people who use a variety of Englishes and have different levels of competence in order to understand reality of ELF communication worldwide, and also encouraging use of English, both in Japan and outside of Japan.

At a more conceptual level, I came to the view that it is important and necessary to provide opportunities to young Japanese people, who are future (B)ELF users, to critically look at their use of English as a lingua franca. The Japanese government policy positions English as an 'international language' and develops education policies accordingly. However, little consideration is given to the potential repercussions of positioning English as a shared language for global communication. Access to English is unequal amongst people worldwide and it is particularly limited in Japan. Yet, government policies have increasingly been presenting high English ability as the global norm. This may pressure students, making it even more difficult for them to start using English. As I argued in Chapter 1, the spread of English as a lingua franca is not natural nor neutral. Japanese people need to be aware of this, and make sense of their use of English within this context.

9-5 Closing comments

To end this thesis, I would like to briefly add my personal voice, not only as a researcher of the study, but also as a user who has a long trajectory of using English as a lingua franca for a range of purposes.

At the beginning of this thesis, I said that the initial idea of the study was born from my feelings that the voice of non-native users of English like myself have yet to be captured in enough detail within linguistic studies exploring the global spread of English. Once I started listening to the stories of participants, I found myself enjoying their narratives because they were interesting in their own right. Their life stories of business careers are interwoven with their pleasures, frustrations, accomplishments, and struggle and I felt privileged to have participants sharing such valuable experiences with me, which may have gone unknown or forgotten if I had not recorded them. Another pleasure for me was to have participants telling me that the interviews were an inspiring opportunity for them following their reflection of English in the past few decades, because my questions and interests enabled them to look back on the meaning of English for their career from different angles. Many participants said that they would never have thought about English so profoundly if I had not interviewed them.

Sometime ago, I went to a presentation on tensions and opportunities in the future global economy by an American scholar from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. In the presentation, he graphically illustrated the projected drastic shift of the world population in the coming few decades. The estimated distribution of the world population in 2030 and beyond made me think deeply about the future of ELF. Up until that moment, I had assumed that the dominance of English will continue for the coming few decades. However, he predicted that the drastic change of the distribution of the world population may change the 'status quo', by saying even the role of the reserve currency that the American Dollar currently plays may be overtaken by the Chinese currency. While I am finalising my PhD project, I came to think that if English could become more global in the sense that it is easier to access and fairer to use for anybody in the world, then it will survive as a lingua franca because of the support of the billions of users. However, if it fails to become a more 'non-native user friendly' global language, then English may be replaced by another language, or perhaps multilingualism will gain more support. In this sense, I believe the future of English as a lingua franca is very much in the hands of its users. How they perceive and use English as a lingua franca will determine its path.

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