

# Interactional Co-Construction of Meaning in ELF: A Sequential Analysis Focusing on Utterance Completions

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## Abstract

Using a sequential analysis, this study investigates how utterance completions by an interlocutor contribute to ELF interactions. The author examines video-recorded ELF interactional data between a Japanese university student and an international student from Vietnam at a Japanese university. Through a sequential analysis, we preliminarily found that utterance completions allow the speaker not only to ensure the smooth talking and also to monitor understanding at every stage of communication, namely collaborative interactional behavior. In other words, they use utterance completions in order to complete the unfinished idea or message and create the meaning between a speaker and a recipient, and to enhance the clarity of their utterance.

## Keywords

English as a lingua franca (ELF), co-construction of meaning, utterance completions, sequential analysis

## 1 Introduction

The ELF researches have gradually shifted from identifying core features such as phonology, lexicogrammar and syntax to the description of the achievement and maintenance of interaction among interlocutors who do not have the same first language (Cogo, 2011).

This paper then attempts to explicate collaborative strategies in ELF interactions, namely utterance completions in restoring understanding problems among participants who are less proficient in English.

## 2 Literature review

ELF is defined as the use of English as a medium language for communication between/among speakers who have different

“linguacultures” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 164). Some major previous findings show that ELF participants employ communication strategies in order to ensure cooperation, resolve problems, and co-construct understanding (Cogo, 2011; Jenkins, 2006; Kaur, 2011). Therefore, many scholars describe ELF talk being the nature of collaborative and cooperative mutual supportive (Meierkord, 1998) and have agreed that there is a lack of overtly understanding of troubles in ELF interactions in spite of ELF speaker’s varied levels of proficiency and linguacultures.

### 2.1 Utterance completions

Compared with repair strategies such as repetition, clarification requests, and paraphrasing, sentence completion “does not involve correction and is not entirely form-focused” (Kaur, 2011, p. 65). According to Kaur, utterance completions are especially notable collaborative strategies that participants in ELF employ when understanding to form and meaning is co-constructed. Cogo (2011, p. 200) suggests that ELF participants tend to use this strategy to “support the smooth development of the conversation”. Further, Meierkord (1998) reports that an interlocutor employ utterance completions to show her/his understanding of the speaker’s thought and also display “candidate utterances” (Firth, 1996, p. 245) required to convey the message by the speaker. In sum, we can conclude that the use of sentence completion shows “the supportive and cooperative nature of interaction in ELF” (Kaur, p. 67).

However, it seems that there exist research gaps. Specially, in previous studies competent English users were mostly chosen as the participating ELF users and moreover many ELF studies have so far centered mostly in Europe. Thus, in the present study, the author

investigates how ELF participants who are less proficient in English employ utterance completions in the interaction at a Japanese university.

### 3 Method

Two male ELF users Yuta and Han (pseudonyms) majoring in science and engineering at a Japanese university voluntarily participated in this study. Table 1 below shows the participants' attributes, such as L1, duration of recording, and English proficiency level. The data recording was conducted in 2016 and the retrospective stimulated recall was also conducted to enrich the analysis of the data.

The author took an emic approach and transcribed and analyzed using Conversation Analysis conventions. Based on previous studies (e.g., Schegloff, Koshik, Jacoby, & Olsher, 2002), the author attempted to make the negotiation process in making unintelligible utterances clear as participants in interactions move toward co-construction of meaning.

Table 1: Participants in the Recorded Interaction

Name	L1	Duration of recording	English proficiency
Yuta	Japanese	15.16	Beginner
Han	Vietnamese		Int-mediated

### 4 Results and conclusion

In excerpt 1 below, Yuta (Japanese) and Han (Vietnamese) are talking about language they feel difficult. Yuta is quick to understand Han's previous turn and provide a lexical "write" that allows Han to express the meaning explicitly.

Expert 1: "it was so hard?"

01. Y: ah: it was so hard?
02. H: ((inclining to his body to Y))
03. Y: it WAS so hard?
04. H: ((nodding)) yes (.) it is very difficult=
05. Y: =ah::
06. H: for Vietnam ((hand gesture))
07. Vietnamese (.) Vietnamese is not
08. using *kanji*=
09. Y: =ah::
10. H: so it is very:: difficult for me
11. Y: →ah::write write?
12. H: write and read (.) everything very
13. difficult

In this excerpt, Yuta and Han do not have

troubles in understanding, rather Yuta tends to ask Han to provide skills which Han feels difficulty in Japanese. Interestingly, Yuta employs sentence completions with the use of minimal response token "ah" to show his agreement. According to Heritage (1989, p. 29), minimal response token such as "ah" or "oh" has a "role in interaction which is almost purely sequential" and includes many functions such as "continuer" or "agreement". This excerpt preliminary shows that ELF participants seem to check and monitor the context and clarify understanding for co-construing meaning in interactions.

In this presentation, the author will report some more examples that the participants employ in their utterance completions to support and help when an interlocutor struggles to express his idea.

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