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Agnieszka Strzałka

Pedagogical University of Cracow, Poland

COMPLAINING IN ENGLISH BY ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA USERS

Introduction

Conveying dissatisfaction may seriously threaten the hearer's as well as the speaker's face, which is the reason why in Anglo culture great care is given not to impose too much while complaining or criticising. As an egalitarian speech community, English native speakers avoid direct criticism even in unequal power relationships e.g. parents to children, teachers to learners, bosses to employees, lest the relationship is threatened. The idea is basically to criticize behaviour not a person, and start one's dissatisfaction statements with "I am, I feel" etc., rather than "you are", "you have", etc., and to mitigate complaining with downgraders: "I am deeply concerned about your performance" as an expression of a boss's dissatisfaction with an employee's work would take a much direct or even harsh form in languages such as Turkish, Russian or Polish for that matter.

In the context of English used as a lingua franca by a number of speakers of different cultural backgrounds, a question arises of the extent to which non native users converge with native speaker strategies when performing the speech act of complaining? Research as well as informal observation show that foreign/second language learners (users of English) often "fail" to produce statements and fixed expressions characteristic of native speakers (Bardovi-Harlig and Vellenga 2012). If compared to native speaker production non native speaker use will be called *marked* or simply *deviant*. But Cook (1999: 189) names the practice of judging non native users' language by the standards of native speaker use "the comparative fallacy". He claims that given the right to decide what becomes the ELF norm, lingua franca users might conceive ELF patterns in their own right and he calls for the development of "multicompetent speaker rather than an imitation native speaker" (Cook 1999: 203).

There are reasons why multilinguals might behave differently in English from English monolinguals. According to Kachru (2009), the Inner Circle, that is native speakers' strategies may be difficult to reproduce by other users of English as a global language. However, unlike the Outer Circle users i. e. those form post colonial countries with long history of institutional English use, the Expanding Circle, which includes European countries, have a tendency to look up to the native

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speaker model. This positions European users as those likely to converge with the native speaker model. On the other hand, non English speaking European nations often represent systems of values different from the values of the native English speaking community.

Thus in the pragmatic aspects of speech, multicompetent users of ELF (global/international) English should easily switch between value code driven behaviour of their own languages and cultures and the lingua franca one, associated primarily with the Anglo code. Does cultural awareness of experienced LF users lead to giving up their home culture values? The aim of the research described in this article is to check the realizations of the act of complaining in elicited informal language tasks presented to non native speakers (Lingua Franca speakers) of different L1 backgrounds. The database of nonnative users' expressions of dissatisfaction should bring in useful insights into the teaching of pragmatic competence in English as an international language.

Complaining across cultures: how the system of values dictates communicative choices

Cultural values behind speech acts

The individualism-collectivism continuum is one of the cultural value systems which dictate speakers' choices in communicative situations. In this discussion American culture serves as an example of the individualistic end.

Individualism

Individualistic cultures, of which American culture is a paragon, value "individuality, respect, rooted in the conviction of equality of people, moderate emotionality, and the promotion success and solidarity" (Bogdanowska-Jakubowska 2010: 168). In language the individualistic need for freedom of action and freedom of imposition is expressed by means of different face saving devices, such as "restraint, hedges, questions, expressions of deference, polite pessimism and conventional indirectness" (Bogdanowska-Jakubowska 2010, after Ting-Toomey 1988; Johnson 1985; Wierzbicka 1985 and Lubecka 2000).

In cultures which value individualism less, imposition, face saving, and politeness may be understood differently. Collectivistic cultures, such as Russian or Ukrainian, for example, place 'the needs of the group above their personal needs' (Triandis 1995 in Nelson 2000: 78). Thus, the hearer is more likely to be less sensitive to his or her negative-face wants as the individual wants of the members of a collectivistic culture are treated as less important than the wants of others (Kozlowa 2004: 99). It is common to rely on other's help and advice, so simple directives are not treated as impositions (Wierzbicka 2003; Doughty 2012), sincerity is valued more than restraint and being direct suggests small social distance, that is treating others as one's own folk.

In Europe, the individualism index of non-English speaking countries is in general lower than index of English speaking countries in the world (Hofstede 2001). It is interesting to see to what extent differences in the individualism index

of a LF speaker's home culture may influence his or her use of speech acts in English, especially the face threatening acts, such as complaints.

Emotionality

In American culture unrestrained expression of emotion, which refers both to positive and negative feelings, is perceived negatively (Bogdanowska-Jakubowska 2010). Expressing emotions is identified with irrationality and may threaten self-face. In Polish culture, in contrast, interpersonal relations and everyday communication are shaped by emotionality (Bogdanowska-Jakubowska 2010). This shows in the exchange of greetings (sharing the information how one really feels), exchange of opinions and feelings, which may take the form of heated debates between family, friends, but also strangers (see Termińska 2006 on verbal attacks on strangers by a group of others). As Poles do not often know how to hedge emotions in polite ways of speaking, dissatisfaction will not be revealed at all or will be revealed violently (Klos-Sokol 2010).

Lubecka (2000) identifies emotionality with the femininity of cultures. Apart from interest in other's life, strong sympathy, sincerity and genuine expression of feelings, feminine cultures practice courteous treatment of women, resulting from gender roles perception of reality, expressing apologies for psychological rather them material damage, resulting from high values put on relationships, and overbearing hospitality which shows in invitations and party rituals.

If pragmatic knowledge is transferred from L1 into L2 (second, foreign or international language), LF speakers from more feminine countries might not be able to abandon their emotionality, or at least will not abandon it completely.

Assertiveness versus modesty

The Anglo, especially north American, assertiveness rooted in individualism and masculinity of culture (Lubecka 1997) means personal autonomy, tolerance for otherness, unambiguous expression of communicative needs. In some cultures, such as Polish, the need for acceptances prevails over the need for autonomy (cited in Bogdanowska-Jakubowska 2010: 184) Frequent *Dziękuję* as an expression of gratitude characteristic of Poles, their timidity and lack of assertiveness may result in playing down dissatisfaction (Bogdanowska-Jakubowska 2010). Once dissatisfaction is voiced it may be voiced more directly and emotionally than in the Anglo community.

Klos-Sokol (2010) describes Poles as speakers who do not believe in cushioned criticism. Instead of using an *off record* criticizing strategy or irony, speakers of Polish might need to express criticism more directly, or, as it threatens the hearers face, never at all. Either the hearer is discouraged by the negative element of what he or she took for a praise, or they do not take it seriously, as it is not direct. On the other hand, for the lack of the gentle indirect strategies, Poles might, according to Klos-Sokol, tolerate certain dissatisfactory states suffering in silence (Bogdanowska-Jakubowska 2010).

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Ritual order/etiquette

According to Goffman (1976), all social encounters are potentially face threatening (cited in Bogdanowska-Jakubowska 2010). Languages offer ritualised statements, expressions for typical interactions to help interactants maintain balance. Ritual constraints have to do with "how each individual ought to handle himself with respect to each of the others, so that he does not discredit his own tacit claim to good character or the tacit claim of the others that they are persons of social worth whose various forms of territoriality are to be respected" (Bogdanowska-Jakubowska 2010, 203).

For example, Chinese speakers use linguistic forms reflecting solidarity politeness when complaining to a person of higher rank, a soft, tentative "I hope" would be used to give face to the hearer by showing respect. Similar expressions are perceived as impolite by Americans, who hedge their want statements with "I would like", or other modals (Chen et al. 2011).

Strategies of providing negative feedback in English

English native speaker strategies

Mitigation, being an "indirect mechanism" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 70), might lower the risk and thus lessen the face threat. The value system based on individualism, democracy, and especially in the case of American English, staying positive (Wierzbicka 1999) makes the speech act of criticism an art of indirectness, where implied criticism may even take the form of a positive statement:

- How was the dinner party?
- oh, the food was nicely displayed

(Bouton 1988, in Kasper 1997)

When it comes to complaining, indirectness serves the function of expressing one's dissatisfaction while protecting the face of the hearer (and the speaker). In Hartley's 1998 study of complaints (Chen et al. 2011: 256), for example, American students' direct complaints (that is Interrogation and Threat, most direct complaint strategies) collected with a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) occupied only 20% of the utterances. It may follow that speakers who want to imitate the native speaker (NS) style should keep emotions at bay, avoid using a dominating tone, or trespassing the personal space of the interlocutor, by implying guilt or incompetence. This is actually the style we can encounter in English course books.

Course book English

When consulting different web pages addressed for English language learners the following patterns for criticizing and complaining can be found:

- Sorry to bother you but...
- I/m sorry to say this but...
- Excuse me but there is a problem (www.myenglishpages)

- Can you help me with that?
- I'm afraid there may be a misunderstanding
- I understand it is not your fault
- Excuse me but I understood that...

(www.englishtown.com)

- Maybe you forgot.../I think you might have forgotten
- Don't get me wrong but I think we should...

(www.about.com)

Critical remarks at workplace

- Overall it is good but there are a few things that could be improved
- Don't take it wrong bit it needs to be...
- Iust be more careful next time
- If you are unsure, ask me

As we can see, the language used in the situations of dissatisfactory performance on the part of the hearer, is mild and non aggressive. The hearer's face or public image is protected and care is taken not to be too straightforward, direct or too explicit.

Speakers of other languages and other English varieties

The question remains, if speakers of other languages, speakers of other varieties of English and multicompetent ELF English users converge with the strategies based on mitigating complaints? What other strategies do they use when speaking English?

Differences between different varieties of English show that the typical Anglo style of criticizing, characteristic of Inner circle speakers is not easily reduplicated. Kachru (2009: 372) quotes Liao's (1997) data from Taiwan English and American English speakers:

AE: I'm (greatly) concerned about your performance. I think you are not (...) TE: I don't like your performance. I'm not pleased/satisfied.

Many English speakers from different cultural backgrounds may retain their more direct style into English as a second, foreign or international language, even at advanced levels. This may be a result of their first languages (and cultures) dictating choices other than the ones normally made in native speaker English.

The French

Comparing the way in which French and Australian employees talk among themselves and to their bosses at workplace, Beal found out that the French style, often carried over into the French speaking English is much more direct. For the French the Australian English speakers' style sounded like "beating around the bush", and while they were seen as bossy by Australians, they also created a (negative) stereotype of an indecisive Australian themselves.

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The Germans

House and Kasper (1981) found that the Germans expressed direct complaints to a greater extent than their English counterparts (cited in Chen et al. 2011: 257). This is in line with a general opinion that Germans value honesty, hence directness, bordering on harshness is not avoided by German speakers, despite the fact that in both English and German languages conventional indirectness is used e.g. in requests (Ogiermann 2009).

Ukrainians

"Ukrainian friends apply the whole rank of complaint strategies from the least offensive to the most severe [while] native speakers of American English use the most indirect and conventionally indirect strategies", found Prykarpatska (2008: 101). An American would say "I was worried." "Everything all right?", "What kept you so long?" while "Ukrainians are the ones who tend to aggravate their complaints with different kinds of intensifying particles and slang words (Prykarpatska 2008: 100). They are likely to say" *Ciemu spiznujesz sia*? (Why are you coming late?), *O sliszko mozna ciekati*? (Oh, well for how long it may be waited?), *Nastupnowa razu ja spiznius* (Next time I'll be late). Emotionality seems to translate into open disapproval strategies (such as Interrogation and Threat used in Chen & Chen research). Also social distance between North American friends is greater than the Ukrainian counterparts (Prykarpatska 2008: 96).

Research: ELF patterns for critical communication

Research Questions

In order to discover to what extent complaining in Lingua Franca differs from complaining in English as L1 and whether there are any ELF variety specific ("marked") ways of providing negative feedback the following research questions are posed:

- (1) How do Lingua Franca English speakers express dissatisfaction used in different social contexts i.e., in public domains, at work and among friends? What strategies are used?
- (2) To what extent do ELF users use <u>fixed expressions</u> when complaining? Is there a tendency towards downgraders (hedges and downtoners, politeness markers) or upgraders (intensifiers)?

Sample

31 adult speakers of English as a Lingua Franca participated in the study by providing answers to an internet survey of a Discourse Completion Test type. There were 4 native speakers and 27 non native speakers of English: seven Polish, one German, two Russian, four Ukrainian, nine French, three Spanish and one Dutch speaker. As native speaker participants admit to frequent intercultural contacts, in the present study they are also considered Lingua Franca users.

Tool for data collection

The Discourse Completion Test asked the participants for open-ended answers (complaints) in nine situations of dissatisfaction, in three different combinations of social distance and power: talking to strangers, acquaintances and friends (see Table 1).

Table 1	Overview	ad the DCT	used to	collect data	
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Situation	Distance and Power relationship	Problem	Setting	Interlocutor
1	+D strangers +P (age)	Door left open	restaurant	Customer to younger customers
2	+D strangers –P (age)	Foot stepped on	street	Younger passerby to older one
3	+D strangers +P (service relationship)	Unclean room	hotel	Client to clerk
4	-D acquaintances +P (experience)	Misplaced file	workplace	Employee to younger employee
5	-D acquaintances P	Mistaken pigeonhole	workplace	Colleague to colleague
6	-D acquaintances -P	Untimely call	business	Employee to client
7	-D friends P	Being late	_	Friend to friend
8	-D friends P	Call promise	_	Friend to friend
9	-D friends P	Wrong information	_	Friend to friend

Method of data analysis

Chen et al. (2011), who compared complaint strategies of American English and Chinese speakers adopted the following six type strategy classification (the order of increasing directness):

- (1) Opting out (OP) the complainer does not say anything.
- (2) Dissatisfaction (DS) simple statement of dissatisfaction, no mention of the complainee.
- (3) Interrogation (IN) presupposing guilt, questioning about the offence (leaves room for explanation).
- (4) Accusation (AC) charges against the complainee.
- (5) Requests for repair (RR) complainer asks for compensation and/or behavior change.
- (6) Threat (TH) attack on the hearer, stating potential consequences.

What is important, in their study 70% of the respondents' productions employed combined strategies in a complaint sequence. Also in the present study many strategies were often used side by side, the most common combination being dissatisfaction and requests for repair (see results). The classification used by Chen et al. as well as the results obtained by them by the native speaker group will be used for comparison in the analysis below.

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Results of the study

Quantitative analysis

The ELF respondents produced 451 strategies in total. The quantitative comparison of the six strategies as used by native speakers (AE) in Chen's study and ELF speakers in the present study is presented below.

Strategy type	Native speakers (Chang et al. 2011)	ELF speakers
Opting out (OP)	0.64%	12.19% 个
Dissatisfaction (DS)	45.34% ↑	30.59%
Interrogation (IN)	4. 82%	13.74% 个
Accusation (AC)	7.72%	7.09%
Requests for repair (RR)	38.26%	35.25%
Threat (TH)	3.22%	0.01%

As we can see, Dissatisfaction and Requests for repair are the most common strategies for both groups. Within the most indirect strategies, there is more opting out (that is saying nothing) in ELF speakers production,. The overall use of the two most indirect strategies looks similar for the two groups (46 % and 43 % respectively). In the middle of the directness scale there seems to be more interrogation (that is presupposing guilt) on the non natives' side, who prove to be more direct at this point of the scale. As for the most direct strategies, overall there is no considerable difference, or even native speaker results show more inclination towards directness (more threats are used!). It is interesting, however, to see how these particular strategies are realized in practice by the ELF users in the present study.

Qualitative analysis

We will now look at examples of particular expressions collected in the DCT from the ELF speakers. For brevity of space three situations have been chosen for presentation: situation no 3, 4 and 7, in which the interlocutor is a stranger, acquaintance and friend respectively.

Talking to strangers (a service encounter)

The following indirect ways of complaining were recorded:

(1)

- I'd like to have my room cleaned (PL)
- I just entered my room and noted that it was not cleaned particularly well (PL)
- Excuse me, but it is unacceptable, my room has not been cleaned. (U)¹ in which hedges, understatement and mitigated personal statements of will are used.

¹ In his example the downtoning 'Excuse me', in fact loses its mitigating function as it is followed by an intensifying 'unacceptable'.

More direct (explicit) complaints were:

(2)

- Please could you clean the room properly. It's **simply dirty** (G)
- You forgot to clean my room! (FR)
- I want to go to another room! (R)
- **I hope** that you will clean my room well **tomorrow** (F)
- Please provide me a clean room. For the wait let it be delux room (U) RNN
- Look, I need to have my room well cleaned. Please ask the person who cleaned it to pay attention (S)
- I want to express my dissatisfaction with the fact that my place has not been cleaned. Therefore could you clean my room until 5pm? Otherwise I won't pay for this day (PL)

As we can see, in this context some speakers declared to use quite indirect ways of expressing dissatisfaction, similar to typical NS strategies. Many other, however, strengthened their complaints with explicit description ("simply dirty", joking exaggeration ("deluxe room"), personal indication of fault ("ask the person who cleaned it") or a deadline and customer threat (last example). The personal statement of will was not mitigated ("I want to"). Thus it is visible that the <u>ELF users do exhibit a tendency towards greater directness.</u>

Communication at work (colleagues)

Indirect complaints (statements):

(3)

- You seem to have put your things in my ph by mistake (E)
- I've just checked my ph and I found some of your things in there (E)
- It's my ph☺ (U)

More direct (explicit) complaints: from interrogation through request for repair to threat:

(4)

- Have you got your ph? I've got a lot of books and i need more space (R)
- Where is your pigeonhole? (PL)
- Could you please remove your stuff from my ph? (PL)
- **Please take care** that it is not your pigeonhole but mine (F)
- **Hey**, this is my ph, can you take your things? (PL)
- I have noted you keep putting your stuff in my ph. It bothers me since there is not enough space for me then. Please start using your ph as of now (PL)
- You often use my ph instead of yours. **Please take care** (F)
- This is the last time I told you, do not put your things in my place! (SP)
- Each of us has his own ph and it's disturbing to find always your things in mine's. I don't want to repeat it again! (SP)
- Excuse me that is my ph. **Keep distance!** (U)
 Humour

(5)

I don't know if you already recognized it but 's my name on the ph. Use yours instead, it will have the same result. Next time it will cost you a beer (G)

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This example of peer to peer social English demonstrates that the English strategies are difficult to follow. Natives would (and did!) normally be friendly in a way that stresses personal freedom and avoid getting emotional, explicit or threatening, they would avoid implying guilt, too. Most ELF speakers, many of which use English on a daily basis, used very direct requests for repair or even threats in this context. They strengthened their utterances with such intensifiers are joking threat (last example), very explicit directive ("keep distance") or interrogated in a way that does not sound very polite in English. (Have you got...?", "Where is your...") Although some utterances do sound rather formal and cold ("Please start using your ph as of now"), many of the examples do still sound friendly – they carry the element of friendly teasing and their directness is probably not meant to abuse. Of course, the phonetic level, intonation and tone of voice, element which are not present in a pen and paper elicitation tool would be crucial to confirm this thesis.

Communication with friends

As the responses presented below refer to the "Your friend is late" situation, used by Prykarpatska (2008) in her study, it will be good to refer to her findings for comparison. To discuss the present study findings first, the following groups of examples were elicited:

(6)

- Is everything ok with you? We'd agreed to meet at xxx and it's now xxx (E)
- About bloody time... what kept you? (E)
- Have trouble putting your shoes on the right foot again? (E)
- What happened? I was worried about you (SP)

in which restraint is matched with an emotional reaction, which is, however, mitigated with concern over the friend or irony on his time management.

There are also examples of more emotional, unmitigated outbursts, in which slang, irony but also threats are used to let the friend know about one's dissatisfaction:

(7)

- Come on, where have you been??? (SP)
- Where have you been? (PL)
- Don't piss me off! You are late again! (PL)
- Come on! Why you have a cell? Use it, you better tell me you'll be late or I won't wait for you (SP)
- **It would be necessary to** warn the delay! (R)
- Wow... Merely 20 min... (PL)
- Right on time as always! So you volunteered to pay the eve. Perfect! (G)
- It's a pleasure to see you! (FR)

Finally, some rather non-emotional complaints, suggesting that punctuality is treated almost in a business-like manner and the choice of words may suggest coldness or paternalistic approach:

(8)

- **Really**, you could call me (F)
- Next time please let me know that you are late so that I can organise myself (FR)

- Glad to see you but as unfortunately you are very late I will not have time to spend with you (F)
- Excuse me you are late. Next time I will not wait for you (U)

It seems that many ELF speakers (see group 2 of examples) share the use of aggravated, internally modified complaints, like the ones used by Ukrainians in Prykarpatska's study (2008: 98), which are made in a single move, "briefly but strongly", (cf. *Z tiebie kawa*, *the coffee is on you*). The use of supportive external moves to justify complain strategy proper, found by Prykarpatska (2008: 109) to be a Anglo American pattern (e.g. *Next time please call if you know you will be more than 10 minutes late*) is also present in ELF users' responses (group 3), but the it is not equally successful in reducing the risk of hearer's face damage.

Conclusions

As the quantitative analysis has shown, taken broadly, ELF speakers use a similar set of strategies to native speakers, as there seems to be a balance of less and more direct strategies in use. However, the original value systems (hidden in L1 communicative behaviour) might be responsible for the qualitative differences, visible in particular examples.

Where the individualism of ELF speakers does not match the Anglo culture indexes, there might be more conventional directness, and the ELF speakers' utterances may sound less polite. However the "less individualistic the more direct" principle, however, seems to be a generalization. Only if strengthened by cultural emotionality (feminine feature), the ELF speakers will sound more direct in complaining:

(9)

- This is the last time I told you, do not put your things in my place! (SP)

So it is not only the Poles who do not often know how to hedge emotions in polite ways of speaking hence their dissatisfaction will not be revealed at all or will be revealed violently (Klos-Sokol 2010). On the other hand, at least in some circles of the traditionally collectivist cultures, individualism, strengthened by the use of English, is on the increase: speakers tend to hold their horses when speaking, avoid advice giving, ordering and direct complaints:

(10)

I just entered my room and noted that it was not cleaned particularly well (PL)
 On the other hand, the highly individualistic but hierarchical culture of French speakers of English seems to influence their choices: there is more formality than emotion and distance than solidarity in their complaints:

(11)

Please take care that it is not your pigeonhole but mine (F)

In general, the non native (ELF) speakers' production does sound more direct and explicit. Aggravation (slang, threats, strong adjectives) seems to be present more in ELF complaints than mitigation (hedges). The mitigation processes, when attempted, are more successful with irony, I think, than they are with the

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politeness marker "please", which does not genuinely soften the messages. This is a well known phenomenon, in many cultures *please* makes a bigger difference than in English. As ELF speakers rub shoulders with other, both native and non native, speakers they do not necessarily feel there is anything wrong with that.

As the frequency of the participants' contacts with other users of English ranged from rare to daily, so must their cultural awareness, understood as a function of this frequency. Some examples showed that under certain circumstances, ELF speakers may adopt a style very much similar to native speakers, while others seem to express themselves in ways uncharacteristic to native speaker English. This "markedness" may be a result of lack of exposure to native speakers' input, subconscious transfer of first language strategies (values) or finally, a marker of identity. After all, why should we all sound the same?

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Internet pages

(www.myenglishpages) (www.englishtown.com)

Wyrażanie niezadowolenia przez użytkowników języka angielskiego jako jezyka miedzynarodowego

Streszczenie

Wyrażanie niezadowolenia stanowi wyzwanie dla tak zwanej twarzy rozmówców. W kulturze anglosaskiej dokłada się wiec starań by chronić twarz przy realizacji tego aktu mowy, unikając otwartej krytyki, nawet w relacjach typu hierarchicznego, a więc pomiędzy rodzicami a dziećmi czy pracodawcami i pracownikami. Krytykować można zachowanie, ale nie osobę, a niezadowolenie wyraża się "oględnie", przy użyciu zwrotów takich jak "wydaje mi się", "chciałbym aby" oraz innych strategii mitygacyjnych. Jednak uczący się języka angielskiego, jego użytkownicy z różnych stron świata, często tworzą wypowiedzi różniące się od tych należących do native speakerów, czy podawanych w podręcznikach do nauki języka angielskiego. Takie wypowiedzi określa się wtedy jako odbiegające od normy. Podejście to Cook (1999) nazywa "pułapką porównań" i wzywa do używania pojęcia multikompetencji w miejsce imitacji modelu native speakera oraz nowego spojrzenia na użycie angielszczyzny międzynarodowej. Artykuł przedstawia przykłady wypowiedzi zaawansowanych, nienatywnych użytkowników języka angielskiego w sytuacjach niezadowolenia i jest próbą przyjrzenia się międzynarodowemu kodowi, jakim jest angielski w wersji lingua franca pod względem realizacji poszczególnych aktów mowy przez użytkowników z różnych kultur.

Słowa kluczowe: English as a Lingua Franca, modele użycia angielszczyzny, strategie interakcji