

## Identity construction using English as lingua franca in an online English class

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### ABSTRACT

The continuous dominance of English as a global lingua franca in the 21st century has led to the proliferation of English classes online where people from different parts of the globe can learn and teach English using different online platforms. In the Philippines alone, the online English teaching industry has generated thousands of jobs as English language learners from other countries, mostly coming from Expanding Circle countries in Kachru's (1992) Three-concentric model of World Englishes, learn English with Filipino online English teachers. Using the Positioning Theory of Davies and Harre (1999) as a tool or lens, this study investigates a single ELF intercultural communication between a Filipino online English teacher and her Chinese student. It aims to examine how the two interlocutors of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds actively construct their identities in an attempt to develop cultural affinity with one another and to contribute to the current literature by presenting how an intercultural teaching approach can help contribute to the sharing of cultural knowledge and construction of a multi-cultural identity among online English teachers and their students.

**Keywords:** *English as lingua franca; online English class; positioning theory.*

### INTRODUCTION

As governments around the world started implementing new educational policies to increase English language proficiency among their citizens, a significant shortage of English language teachers in these countries has led to the demand for both self-paced products and live online tutoring by English-speaking teachers (World Wide English Language Learning Market Overview 2016). In 2012, online tutoring was an \$11.8 billion industry, but it is predicted to get roughly nine times that size in 2018 (Frey, 2016). According to Wilbur (2015), the major reason why online English learning is growing at 14% per year in Asia and Latin America is that many students are moving online. English language learners around the globe try to learn and practice their English skills by practicing with English speakers using different online platforms (Guinan, 2014).

When the online English learning industry is still starting, most of the teachers are native English speakers (Montrose, 2016). As of 2016, there are already more than ten thousand Filipino online English teachers catering to students from all over the world, from China, Japan, Korea, and some countries in South America (World Wide English Language Learning Market Overview 2016). As the Philippines is recognized as one of the largest English-speaking nations with majority of its population having at least some degree of fluency in the language, English language learners coming mostly from Expanding Circle countries in Kachru's (1992) Three-concentric model of World Englishes such as Japan, China, Korea, etc., who study with Filipino English teachers are on the rise due to the more affordable English language learning programs offered by Filipinos (Cabigon, 2013). In an article by Paredes (2013) in the Philippine Daily Inquirer, a major online English school based in China found Filipinos to be "very proficient,

friendly, [...] patient” and “having an American style of English” which is why they are “easy to market” to Chinese learners of English.

Since these online English schools in general, promote a conversational approach to learning English, they do not require their teachers to know the first language of their students and there is hardly an emphasis on the teaching of grammar, phonics and other features of the English language (Wilbur, 2015; Guinan, 2014). Filipino online English tutors communicate with their students using only English (Paredes, 2013) thus making it an English as Lingua Franca (ELF) interaction where English serves as the only ‘contact language’ between the interactants (Seidlhofer, 2001). In this ELF interaction between Filipino online English tutors and their non-Filipino students, one wonders how the English language and the use of it play a role in the construction of identities of Filipino online English tutors and their non-Filipino students as they position themselves as teachers and learners of a ‘standard English’.

While there may be a number of studies of international norms that facilitate ELF communication, research on the ways in which identities and local cultures and values are negotiated have not been thoroughly explored. Just as what Gu et. al (2014) have argued, there is a need to go beyond the content of ELF interactions and instead focus on the way ELF speakers construct and present their identities in order to develop cultural affinity with one another given the range of Englishes at their disposal. Aiming to contribute to studies exploring English as lingua franca in Asian contexts (Kirkpatrick, 2010), this paper investigates a single ELF intercultural communication between a Filipino online English tutor and her Chinese student. The study aims to examine how the two interlocutors of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds actively construct their identities in an attempt to develop cultural affinity with one another.

#### *Identity Construction in ELF Interactions*

English as Lingua Franca (ELF), proposed primarily by Barbara Siedlhofer (2001, 2004, 2005, 2009), looks into the use of English as a ‘contact language’ between speakers who do not share the same first language. According to its major proponents, ELF developed mainly because there is a need to think of English as evolving out of spread, not distribution (Widdowson, 1997), and acknowledge the vital role of ELF users as ‘agents of language change’ (Brutt-Griffler, 1998). Also as social conditions and relationships between language and society have undergone radical change in recent decades (Siedlhofer, 2005), the way ELF speakers “assert and communicate their own identities with how they use the [English] language creatively and ‘subversively’ rather than mimicking native speakers of English has also changed throughout the years” (Siedlhofer, 2009, p. 239).

As a language ideology, ELF goes beyond the traditional native-speaker norm and nation-bounded varieties, and recognizes and validates the pluricentric nature of English flowing across national boundaries (Cogo, 2012; Jenkins, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2011). Under such circumstances, English plays a key role in many expanding contexts.

Though English is used and chosen as the lingua franca by speakers of different languages for communication (Seidlhofer, 2004), Baker (2011) argued that English in ELF communication is not really a culturally neutral language as has been suggested in some (House, 2002; Kirkpatrick, 2007). Holliday (2011) developed this stance further by pointing out that in any form of communication, there is always the embedding of social situations that involve speakers of different purposes and positions; none of which are culturally neutral. Furthermore, he posits that the way we conceive and make use of culture is always an ideological process that changes depending on the here-and-now of interactions (ibid.).

Building on these notions, some studies have shown how users of ELF construct their identities in the process of ELF communication. In one study by Virkkula and Nikula (2010) of Finnish users of English

before and after a period spent in Germany, they argued that these ELF users actively draw on different discourses in constructing their identities as foreign language users. They pointed out how “lingua franca use, as well as being a matter of communication, is to a great extent also a matter of identification” (p. 270). Echoing to this, Gu et al. (2014) looked into the identity issues involved in an interaction of three ELF users in a multicultural university. They argued that as the three interlocutors moved beyond language use in specific interactional context, they all “drew on their own histories and cultural knowledge to define and re-define the different positions of English language varieties [...] and positioned their own English varieties at a privileged position than their interactants” (p. 139). Gu et al. argued that ELF communication provides “a context for interlocutors to see themselves through the lens of their embodied history and subjectivity and that of others, in creating new relationships and identities” (2014, p. 141).

As these studies have shown, an active construction of identities take place in the process of ELF communication where the interactants’ embodied histories and cultural knowledge are at play as they position themselves as English language users. In this paper, I am to show how Filipino online English tutors and their non-Filipino students construct and negotiate their identities as English language teachers as they engage in ELF communication with their non-Filipino students.

### *Positioning Theory*

In contrast to structuralist theories of language which focus on the study of linguistic knowledge (competence) over performance (Saussure, 1966, Chomsky, 1986), poststructuralist theories of language (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984, 1986; Foucault, 1984) view language not as idealized forms independent of their speakers or their speaking, but rather as “situated utterances” (Bakhtin, 1984) in which speakers, in dialogue with others, struggle to create meanings. Language learning, according to Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, is a process of struggling to use language in order to participate in specific speech communities (1981). Using language meant using a tool that others had already used before, thus speakers of that language are constrained by its past usages. Bakhtin pointed out how social positions outside language may affect any individual’s speaking privilege thus putting him either in a powerless or powerful position in certain discourses.

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s work, on the other hand, addresses the poststructuralist study of the politics of language (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1991; Albright & Luke, 2008). He emphasized the importance of power in structuring discourse, with the participants hardly sharing equal speaking ‘rights’. Determining who are ‘legitimate’ and ‘illegitimate’ speakers, according to Bourdieu, is mainly based on the differential ‘rights to speech’ of the speakers or their ‘power to impose reception’ (1977, p. 648). Using language is thus a social and political practice in which an utterance’s value and meaning is determined in part by the value and meaning ascribed to the person who speaks it. Recognizing that the ascribed value of an individual or a group can vary depending on the ‘field’ on which the individual or group is in, Bourdieu looks at linguistic discourse as ‘a symbolic asset which can receive different values depending on which and to whom it is offered’ (1977, p. 651).

Christine Weedon (1987/1997), a known scholar in the feminist poststructuralist tradition, also argued that it is in language that the individual constructs her ‘subjectivity’. (1997, p. 28). Her use of the term ‘subjectivity’ connotes that individuals can be at the same time the subject OF a set of relationships (e.g. in a position of power) or subject TO a set of relationships (e.g. in a position of reduced power). Thus, for Weedon, social relationships are crucial in how identities are constructed and negotiated through the identification by the individual with particular subject positions within discourses (1997). Similar to Michel Foucault (1972) who claimed that power is ubiquitous in discourse, Weedon argued that subjectivity is “discursively constructed and always socially and historically embedded” (1972, p. 31).

The concept of positioning by Davies and Harre (1999), on the other hand, focuses on the social construction of identities and the world through discourse. The term discourse has varying definitions in different disciplines, but the most common definition that can be found, according to Kayi-Aydar (2015), is “language in use” (p. 95). This understanding of discourse in positioning theory and its relation to personhood is consistent with poststructuralist discourse. As Davies (2000) suggests, “poststructuralist discourse entails a move from the self as a noun (stable and fixed) to the self as a verb, always in process, taking its shape in and through the discursive possibilities through which selves are made” (p. 137). Thus, the term position is used to focus on the dynamic aspects of selfhood, unlike the concept of “roles” which imply being static and fixed to a certain set of criteria (Kayi-Aydar, 2015). Positions thus are situation-specific, disputed, challenged, changing, shifting, and therefore dynamic (Harre and Slocum, 2003; van Langenhove and Harre, 1999). As speakers actively position themselves in talk (Korobov and Bamberg, 2004) they (co)construct and (re)shape their self. This is called *reflexive positioning* (Davies and Harre, 1999) whereas *interactive positioning*, on the other hand, refers to the instances when individuals position others (Davies and Harre, 1999).

Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, and Johnson (2005) maintain that a comprehensive understanding of teachers, teaching, and teacher education requires attention to both “identity-in-discourse” and “identity-in-practice” (p. 38). Identity-in-discourse acknowledges that “identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse” (Hall, 2000, p. 17). Poststructuralist theory argues that identity construction “occurs through the identification by the individual with particular subject positions within discourses (Weedon, 1997, p. 108). The concept of identities-in-practice, meanwhile, suggests a mutually constitutive relationship between identity and practice. Identities develop only in situ, as one takes part in the practices of a community and learns the ways of being and doing in the community.

Given its tight connection to identity, positioning is viewed as a powerful tool to analyze identity in discourse (Kayi-Aydar, 2015). Thus, the positioning theory of Davies and Harre (1999) will be used in this study to understand how a Filipino online English tutor and her student construct and negotiate their identities in order to develop cultural affinity with one another.

## METHOD

This study aims to understand the dynamic construction of identity in an ELF intercultural communication between a Filipino online English tutor and her Chinese student. For this study, a recording of their first class together was analyzed. Both the Filipino online English tutor and her Chinese student know that their class would be recorded for the school’s monitoring purposes. For this paper, the Filipino tutor, the Chinese student, and representative of the school management were all approached in a neutral environment and given permission sheets asking their approval that the class recording would be used for this study. All parties were informed that their actual names, the company name, together with all the information that would trace to their identities would be changed or eliminated to protect their privacy and that if they decided to withdraw from participating in this study, of which they did not, the recording and records of their participation would be destroyed.

The corpus used was drawn mainly from the transcription of the class recording. The recording was transcribed in verbatim including the false starts, hesitations, and flawed grammar to accurately portray the speakers’ true utterances. The study mainly intends to generate information as well as insights as to how the two ELF interlocutors of entirely different cultural and linguistic backgrounds actively construct their identities to develop cultural affinity in the process of teaching and/or learning English.

Analysis of the corpus was done in a recursive, iterative manner, moving back and forth between the data and the framework used in this study which is the positioning theory as developed by van Langenhove

and Harre (1999). The "indigenous concepts" (Patton, 2002, p. 454) employed by the two ELF interlocutors when negotiating their positions (e.g. standard English, American accent, British accent) have been identified. The connection among these concepts was established together with the theoretical categories that help answer the research question raised in this study. These theoretical categories are "negotiation of roles", "negotiation of identity", "shifting subject positions" and "establishing alignment". Data analysis anchoring on these four categories was informed by positioning theory to obtain information and insights as to how the two ELF interlocutors, the Filipino online English tutor and her Chinese student, positioned themselves, responded to being positioned, and deliberately positioned the other in an attempt to establish their identities as legitimate users of English.

## RESULTS

In the start of the conversation, the Filipino Tutor, or FT, makes a remark of the Chinese Student's, or CS, accent, saying that it sounds British. She tries to establish alignment with CS by referring to popular culture, saying that CS's accent is similar with Emma Watson, a known British actress. She sets a contrast with CS accent to that of the American accent by doing what she believes to be the American accent. In doing so, she attempts to establish a legitimate identity of an English tutor who can identify different varieties of English accents. However, this identity is challenged by CS as she questions the correctness of the words FT tries to speak in a British accent. The following extract shows how the two interlocutors try to construct their identities as speakers of English: (in this scenario, FT still does not know that CS studied for two years in a university in London)

- 1 FT: can you hear me?
- 2 CS: yes, much much better @@@ finally (1)
- 3 FT: oh, yeah, (1) yeah (.) you're accent is british now (2) <pcv> better <pcv>, (1) right? @@@ yeah
- 4 CS: better @@@@
- 5 FT: yeah, because if you will speak it the american way, you will say bet-ter (:) </CS @>, right? bet-ter (:) (1) yeah, but in your case (.), it seems this sounds bet-tuh (:) @@@
- 6 CS: </FT @> you're so funny @@@
- 7 FT: Yeah, okay. (.) your accent is very cute (:) (1) yeah (.) your accent is really cute (1) like i can hear emma watson (1) you know emma watson, right?
- 8 CS: yeah, i know, know. @@@ yeah, i've watched harry potter before.
- 9 FT: yeah, it's just that your voice is a bit boyish </CS @> her voice is sexy, </CS: sexy? @> your case, it is a bit boyish? </CS @> yeah, but you have the same accent (1) yeah, you have the same accent. (1)
- 10 CS: @@@ thank you, thank you.
- 11 FT: right, yeah, my pleasure (.) plea-zhur? @@@ all right
- 12 CS: @@@ pleazhur?
- 13 FT: yeah @@ plea-zhur @@ okay. (2) toh-dai (today). @@
- 14 CS: toh-dai?

As can be seen from these lines, FT self-positions herself as a legitimate teacher of English by showing her knowledge of different English accents to CS. However, in turns 11 and 13 where FT tries to imitate the British accent by pronouncing the words "pleasure" and "today", CS seems to question their accuracy as can be seen in turns 12 and 14. From here, it can be construed that CS makes an attempt to challenge FT's constructed identity as an English tutor knowledgeable of different English accents. Within this process, we see CS's deliberate positioning of FT by questioning FT's teachings, thus, challenging FT's dominant role. In the following extract, in turn 1, FT has to forced position herself as she admits that though she likes the British accent, she is "more used to speaking the American accent".

- 1 FT: i like the british accent (1) but i'm used to speaking the american accent (.) so, (1) yeah

- 2 CS: where do you come from?
- 3 FT: yeah, i come from the PH, the philippines, but (2) but yeah, (1) but my accent is way different from the filipinos @@ yeah, so i guess i'm trying to adopt the (: ) american accent, (1) uh-hum
- 4 CS: i think, uh, it's not very (1) americano @@
- 5 FT: oh, really? thank you @@ (.) okay, yes @@ so this time we will be having (.) okay, i can also do the british </CS @@> but it's just that I'm not used to using it (2) bet-tuh (1) I like it @@@ okay? </CS @@> so this time, we'll be having the mock exam

In the second extract, after FT self-positions herself as having a native-like (American) accent, CS questions where FT comes from. FT replies by saying that she is from the Philippines. She tries to reassert her identity as a legitimate teacher of English by telling CS that though she is a Filipino, “her accent is way different from Filipinos”, and that she “tries to adopt the American accent”. CS comments that FT does not sound “Americano”. In this she positions FT as someone who should not present herself as native-like speaker of English.

FT has to forced position herself as someone who positively takes CS comment by thanking her for it, but she also resists CS deliberate positioning of her by telling that “[she] can also do the British accent”, it’s just that “she is not used to using it”. She imitates CS’s way of pronouncing the word “better” for the second time and through this, she positions herself as someone who can also learn from CS.

- 1 FT: so are you ready, yu\*\*\*? (2) oh, how to pronounce correctly your name? yo-\*\*\* (:)?
- 2 CS: yurr-\*\*\*
- 3 FT: oh, yurr-\*\*\*, like the chinese yurr (:)
- 4 CS: yes, yes @@ the chinese way
- 5 FT: i like speaking chinese too, like my dad is a republican chinese (1) my surname in my qq is my real surname (1) [name]
- 6 CS: oh, [name]
- 7 FT: (2) so are you ready?
- 8 CS: yes

In the third extract, for FT to further save herself from the critical face-threatening moment, she tries to establish congruence/alignment with CS by letting her know that she is also knowledgeable of Chinese accent. She tells her that she is also of Chinese descent. She tries to construct an in-group identity with CS in order to develop cultural affinity with her. In the process, she establishes alignment with CS who is also multilingual and multicultural like her.

After having an IELTS mock exam with where FT acts as an IELTS examiner and CS an examinee, FT gives her comment about CS’s performance.

- 1 FT: so we're done with our class and our mock exam (2) so far, with regards to your answer (.) you can able (1) you don't have much problem. (.) you are able to answer points directly, but these are the things you work out. (.) i think i noticed five (1) so the first one is to avoid pauses and delays (: ) if noticed that sometimes if you're thinking you will have noticeable pauses and delays (.) so the examiner will notice it right? like you will pause for a long time (.) like every now </CS: like uh> like that (1) so for you to get rid of that you can use alternate expressions to fill in the fillers, okay? </CS: oh> or alternate expressions you can use to fill in the filler (1) to fill in the air into your pause </CS: k> because you are thinking (2) so such examples are well, so, </CS: so?> therefore, in order to (: ) like this expression
- 2 CS: (2) okay
- 3 FT: so if you've noticed those native speakers (1) or british professional speakers (: ) they will not pause silently for a very long time (1) you can pause silently, but you can only do it in 1 to 2 seconds (.) but if it is very long (: ) longer than 2 seconds it is not good already because probably

- the examiner will think that you are nervous, right? </CS: yes> uh-hum (1) you are having difficulties in in expressing your thoughts? (1) right? even though if it's not true (:)</CS: okay> but they will think in this way so you cannot fight with it, right?
- 4 CS: (1) yes
- 5 FT: in expressing your thoughts (1) uh your thoughts </CS: yes> or (: ) or you simply don't have the answer, right? (1) or you don't know how to say it, right? some ideas (1) so just like this one. so you need to avoid these interpretations from the examiner </cs: okay> and also another thing, so avoid the pauses and delays (.) so in doing that you need to use alternate (: ) expressions like well (1) if you are thinking (2) so, like that (.) </CS: yes> so as you've noticed those people having a problem speaking in front of the camera (.) say well (1) like the barrack obama (2) yeah, try not to <slow> uh (2) uh (1) uh (:)
- 6 CS: yeah (1) true
- 7 FT: like this (.) that's the other thing you have to avoid, (.) avoid mannerisms (1), because if you keep doing this one in your actual exam (.) like aah (: ) you will say <slow> aah (: ) uhuh uhuh (: ) ummm (: ) like this (1) the examiner will get annoyed, right? </cs: true> yeah (1) the examiner will get annoyed. uh-hum (1) </CS: true> yeah (1) okay, like it can somehow affect your performance score too (2) another thing, you need to answer immediately because i've noticed earlier (1) most especially part 1 and 3, you were not given 1 minute to prepare like in part 2 so right after the examiner finish asking you the question, you need to answer immediately </CS: oh> (1) answer immediately like after the examiner finished asking you the question </CS: okay> just like that (1) another point (.) you need to have a more brighter tone because it seems like your voice is a bit gloomy (: ) so just like (.) just like what you have earlier when we were having a chat or a conversation (1) </CS: yes> so you need to have a brighter tone, of voice </CS: okay> so that all voice or words you're saying will sound clear (1) because most of the time when you have a gloomy voice, you tend to (2) somewhat like you will not be able to speak the words clearly like the latter sound (1) it can misinterpret the examiner, </CS: yes> like what are those words you are saying (2) yeah, like this case (.) instead of saying the word help. then you need to elaborate the p (.) so it sounded like hell, </cs: oh> so it's a different meaning, right?
- 8 CS: yeah (: ) </FT: uh-huh>
- 9 FT: so you need to have a more brighter tone of voice </CS: yes> so in that manner you can speak word per word clearly, </CS: okay> including the letter sounds, like the f, the p (puh), b (buh), v(vuh), because you're voice in talking is somewhat like, a bit gloomy (xxx).. it seems that you are just chatting with your friend, or you're reading something, right? (2) or you're reading a book, right?
- 10 CS: yeah (1) okay (:)
- 11 FT: okay (.) one more thing, and this will be the (.) </CS: yes> make sure to pay attention to the time limit </CS: okay> so just like earlier, probably, since there's a time limit in your side, so you will notice the time (1) so make sure that you will (1) um, somewhat like delete some other things so you can just direct points immediately (1) okay? to avoid exceeding the time limits (2) so do you have some questions?
- 12 CS: no (:)
- 13 FT: no questions?
- 14 CS: uh (1) no (.) your suggestions are helpful

FT repositions herself as someone knowledgeable of the IELTS Scoring System. After getting deliberately positioned by CS in the earlier part of the conversation, FT reasserts her identity as someone who is a legitimate teacher of IELTS by undermining CS's way of delivering her answers and saying that it is not the same with "British professional speakers". FT draws on the language ideology that values British and American English as standard Englishes and that one must learn either one of the two in order to be accepted to a native English-speaking community. What more is that she emphasizes the importance of speaking in a professional manner which she is unable to clearly define. She comes up with rigorous

standards that one must adhere to in order to get a good IELTS score. She emphasizes that one must “not pause for more than two seconds”, one “must answer immediately”, and one “must not speak in a gloomy tone of voice”. Though she knows that the reasons for having to pause when speaking can be caused by nervousness, she still stresses that CS cannot depend on this consideration, she deliberately positions CS in a situation where she has adhere to rigorous standards for being unable to do so would mean she will be considered as “[a person] having problems speaking [English]”.

By downplaying CS’s way of delivering her answers, FT marginalizes CS English in her attempt to reposition herself as an expert in English language. Unable to come up with a counter-discourse, CS can only tell FT that her “suggestions are helpful”.

- 1 FT: yeah, so just like that (2) with regards to your answer, i think, so far so good (1) i did not notice any grammatical errors (.) yeah, because i think for chinese people, basic grammars is really number one priority, </CS: yes> but because you've been doing written exercises in English, so I think the basic grammars is really given (2) it's just that in speaking (.) you have difficulties in expressing it (1) but in your case, since you've been in UK for two, (.) two years so it's somewhat like improved you a lot </CS: yes> but if you're staying in china, only, so sometime (1) probably (.) you'll have difficulties in expressing your thoughts
- 2 CS: yes (.) it's very difficult for chinese students to learn grammar i think (1) so, true. (.) because it's also very different from other language
- 3 FT: yeah, okay (1) the expression i think you can say it in the written part </CS: yes> or written aspect, but i think in speaking it's kinda difficult
- 4 CS: yeah (:)
- 5 FT: so you need to (2) you just need to (1) you need to just pay attention to these things. </CS: okay> so you have any question?
- 6 CS: (2) uh (.) how much can I get in this?
- 7 FT: yeah, if ever (1) in part 1 i can give you 6.5 (.) in part 2, in part 1, 6 (1) the details in your part 2 is very creative and artistic (.), because usually in part 1 and 3 you had pauses so i give you (1) but if you can get rid of this part (1) so do you have any more questions?
- 8 CS: yeah, i'm actually applying for master in interpreting </ft: oh> yeah, that's why i need to redo my IELTS exam </CS: i see> actually i'm already an under graduate in uk (1) so if i apply for any other subjects like management or finance, i no longer do not need to give them my IELTS score again (.), but for interpreting i have to do it and they said i have to reach 7 in speaking so i think that's a huge (2) a huge task for me (2) yeah
- 9 FT: okay
- 10 CS: (2) yeah
- 11 FT: so just like that (1) you need to get 7? yeah, so (.) i think that's possible, you just need to work out with the problems (2) okay?
- 12 CS: okay
- 13 FT: yeah (1) i will send the recordings to you
- 14 CS: oh, okay, </FT: yes> that's too good
- 15 FT: okay, so for now, i want say goodbye and i hope you'll do great in your actual exam just uh. (1) also your voice is a bit tense (.) i forgot that part so you need to have a more, more confident tone of voice, yeah, okay? (1) have a (.) have e a confident (1) tone of voice
- 16 CS: yes, yes, okay
- 17 FT: just relax and be calm, okay? (:)
- 18 CS: (2) okay
- 19 FT: uh-hum (1\_ so good luck and i hope that you'll get a 7. jia you! @@
- 20 CS: bye @@

Realizing that she has already put CS in a disadvantageous position, FT tries to ameliorate this by saying that she did not notice any grammatical errors in CS’s responses. She equates this to CS getting educated



in a university in UK for two years which puts her at an advantage over other Chinese English learners who have only stayed in China. CS agrees to this and tells FT that it is really difficult for Chinese students to learn grammar for their common L1, Chinese, is different from other languages. CS also repositions herself to that of a British language user instead of learner by reiterating to FT that she has already passed IELTS before, it is just that she has to redo it for her application in the Master of Interpreting program.

FT tries to establish alignment with CS by recognizing the difficulties CS has to overcome in order to be proficient in English. She tries to develop cultural affinity with her by saying that she understands CS's struggles to achieve her desired score and that it will be possible for her to achieve it only if she will pay attention to the things she has told her. FT then ends their conversation by using the Chinese greeting "Jia you!" or the Chinese for good luck in order to establish a multicultural and in-group identity with CS.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study tried to determine the dynamic construction of identity in a single ELF intercultural communication between a Filipino tutor and Chinese student. Positioning theory was the framework used in this study to examine the subject positions the Filipino tutor and the Chinese student adopted in order to reach cultural affinity with each other.

Results of the study showed that the identities of the ELF participants were not fixed but rather actively constructed in the different phases of the discourse and were culturally determined. The ELF interlocutors' linguistic knowledge and cultural repertoire contributed to how they positioned themselves in different phases of the discourse. Both macro- and micro- linguistic context play a role in constructing identity and negotiating power relations as can be shown on the interlocutors' self-positioning, forced positioning, and deliberate positioning of each other. To gain an advantageous position in their interaction, both the interlocutors display different language ideologies at different phases of the discourse. A dynamic interplay between legitimacy and illegitimacy, marginality and authority of language varieties, and rigid views of language learning and usage (Anderson, 2009) are at work this interaction. The Filipino tutor's self-positioning of herself as a user and teacher of a 'standard English' and her intentional and unintentional positioning of her student in both positive and negative ways influenced the student's self-positioning.

Instead of seeing the student's non-standard English as deficient, the Filipino online English tutor in this study may adopt an intercultural teaching approach in which she may allow her student "space to negotiate, analyze, and reflect on the socio-cultural aspects of intercultural communication (Gu et al., 2014). Instead of continually emphasizing how the sound can sound like a 'native speaker', the Filipino tutor in the study could have helped her student become a more empowered English language user by adopting an intercultural teaching approach where she can focus on what the student already has, the linguistic and cultural resources she brings with her in the interaction, and build on it to help the student become more invested in learning the English language (Norton, 2000). Part of this intercultural teaching approach is to help learners to be critically aware of the roles that different languages play in their lives and to value the communicative competence that one has acquired in one's home language in learning the target language. This way both the tutor and the student can become empowered as they can both position themselves as legitimate speakers of whatever English they have and it is more about understanding the language and behavior of the target community, without having to 'downplay' their own home culture and home language.

## CONCLUSION

This study about the construction of identities in the ELF intercultural communication between a Filipino tutor and her Chinese student reveals that the identities of the ELF participants were not fixed but rather were actively constructed in the different phases of the discourse. Both their identities were also culturally determined. The ELF interlocutors' linguistic, knowledge, and cultural repertoire contribute to how they position themselves in different phases of the discourse.

In order to develop cultural affinity with one another, both tried to establish alignment based on their being multilingual and multicultural. However, this was not maintained all throughout the interaction as the Filipino tutor focused on setting "the British professional speaker standards" to her student that would be too ambiguous to follow.

This study thus suggests that Filipino online English tutors can adopt an intercultural teaching approach wherein the linguistic and cultural resources that they and their students bring with them in the interaction will be valued and build upon so that both parties can become more empowered English language users in this era of globalization.

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## APPENDIX

Transcription Conventions adapted from the Vienna Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE)

FT, speaker ID for the Filipino online English tutor

CS, speaker ID for the Chinese student

(.) indicates a brief pause for up to half a second in duration; longer pauses are timed to the nearest second and marked with the number of seconds in parenthesis (e.g., (1)=1 second)

Laughter and laughter-like sounds are identified using the symbol @, and the number of syllables approximated (e.g. ha-ha=@@)

When two or more utterances are simultaneous, the overlaps are marked with tags for each speaker: </FT: \_\_>, </CS: \_\_>

<pcv> is for the pronunciation variations and coinages made by the speakers

Sounds that have been lengthened or emphasized are marked with a (:)

Names of the speakers, places, cities etc. are omitted so as to protect the speakers' identities and are replaced by [name 1] and \*\*\* (if only a certain number of characters have to be eliminated)

Utterances spoken in a particular mode (fast, slow, read, etc.) that are notably different from the speaker's normal speaking style are marked accordingly (e.g. <fast>, <slow>, etc.)

