

Teaching accommodation strategies in the business English classroom

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Outline

- 1 What is accommodation?
- 2 Try out some activities / reflect.
- 3 Discuss implications for own context

English as a lingua franca (ELF)

“any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option”

(Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 7)

EFL and ELF

“EFL is considered successful when it converges to a target model, ELF when it is mutually intelligible.”

(Hülmbauer, 2009)

Features of a business lingua franca

- Mutual intelligibility, not rules of the native speaker
- Aim is to get the job done, not meet “theoretical” linguistic standards
- Problems caused not by inadequate language skills, but by inadequate business communication skills
- Culture is not dominated by the “native speaker” national culture, but by a mix of business cultures / speakers’ cultures

Why accommodation?

- Accommodation ... “has been shown to play a very important role in international intelligibility”. (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 49)
- “in ELF pragmatics accommodation is key to the successful accomplishment of ELF communication” (Cogo, 2009, p. 268).
- “in international communication, the ability to accommodate to interlocutors with other first languages than one’s own... is a far more important skill than the ability to imitate the English of a native speaker.” (Jenkins, 2007, p. 238).

Accommodation

"the process by which speakers adjust their communicative behaviour to that of their interlocutors in order to facilitate communication"

(Cogo, 2009, p. 254).

Accommodation

“the adaptation of one’s listening or speaking to the needs of one’s conversational partners”

(Deterding, 2013, p. 5)

Types of accommodation

- Phonetic (listening and speaking)
- Code-switching / translanguaging (using all linguistic resources)
- Pragmatic strategies (e.g. repetition, paraphrase, utterance completion)

Accommodation



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/heimdahlrecounts/4344251652>



Activity 1

Discuss this question with your partner.

Do you change the way you speak when you talk to someone from another country?

- Why / why not?
- How?

Strategies

- collaborative utterance completion
- back-channelling
- showing agreement
- encouragement
- repetition
- paraphrase
- code-switching

Co-construction

Brazilian: how long do you need to get there?

Japanese: how long?

Correct “standard”
form, not
understood

Brazilian: how long time do you need to get there?

Non-standard form,
understood

Japanese: ah (.) it takes about 12 hours

(Dewey, 2011, p. 210)

Idioms

ISABEL: I mean we don't have problems ... we all get on yeah

NANA: yeah I think we are all on the same ... on in ... ah: what is it ... on the same boat

ISABEL: yeah?

NANA: yeah? ... how do you say? on the same boat?

ISABEL: I don't know yeah ... on the same boat I think ... on the bus on the train

ANNA: anyway we understand you

ISABEL: yeah ... we are all foreigners

NANA: all foreigners (laughing)

(Cogo, 2010, p. 303)

Idiom principle

“The principle of idiom is that a language user has available to him or her a large number of semi-preconstructed phrases that constitute single choices, even though they might appear to be analyzable into segments.”

(Sinclair, 1991, p. 110)

Activity 2

Find a partner with a different accent to you.
Try and copy each others way of speaking. Use these examples or choose your own.

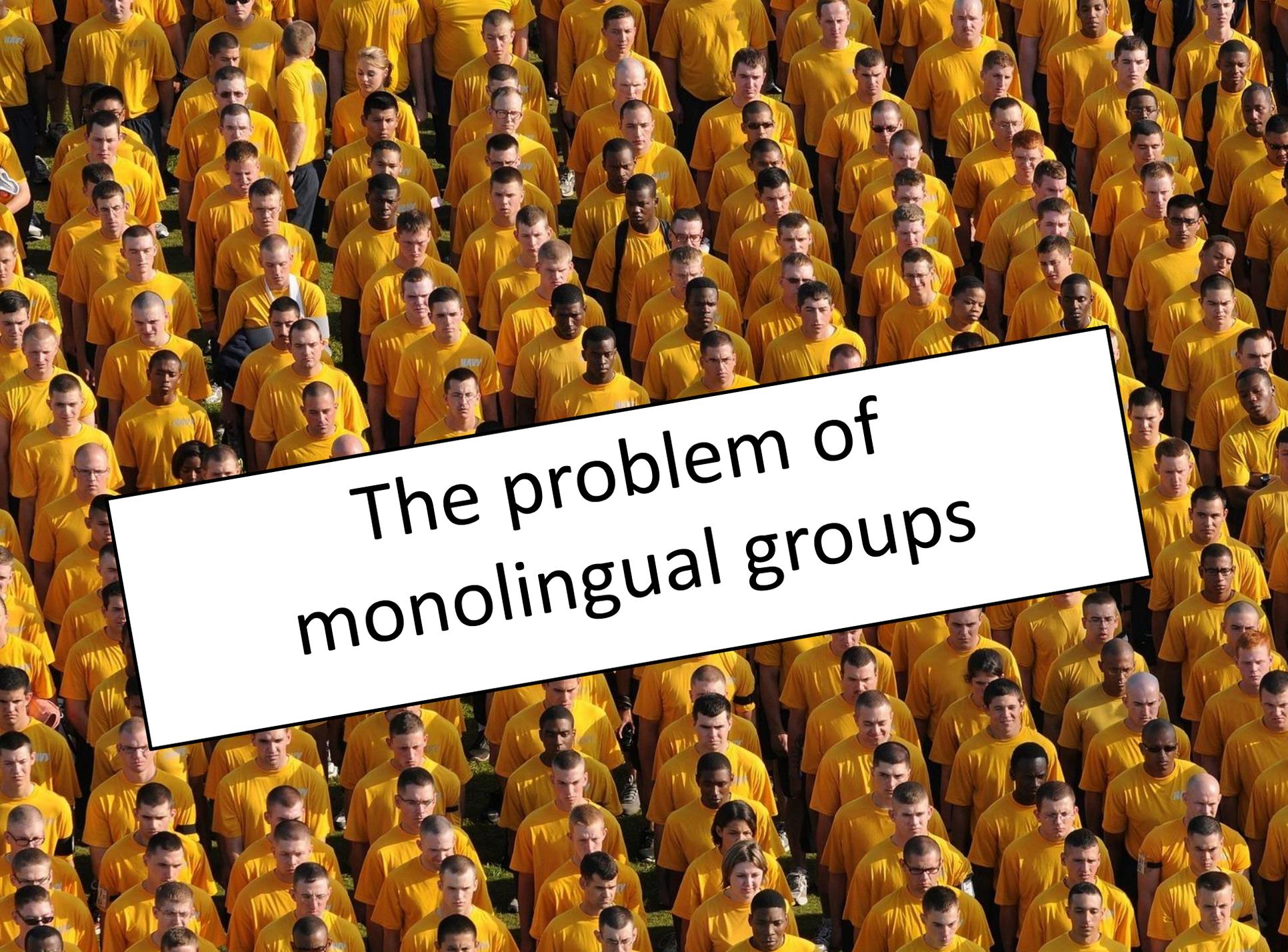
Isn't this gathering of in-company trainers from across Northern Europe wonderful?

The Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg, to give it its full name, is sandwiched between the Baltic and North Seas.

Find a new partner and repeat.

Reflection

What did you observe? Discuss with a partner.

A large crowd of people, mostly young men, are standing in rows outdoors. They are all wearing bright yellow t-shirts. The crowd is dense and fills most of the frame. In the foreground, a white rectangular box with a black border is tilted diagonally, containing the text "The problem of monolingual groups" in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The background shows more of the crowd extending into the distance under bright, natural light.

**The problem of
monolingual groups**

Activity 3

Listen and reformulate – participants listen to a message and reformulate it so that a less competent speaker will be able to understand what is being said.

Activity 3

Form groups of three / four. Decide who is Person A, Person B, Person C, Person D.

Person A turn away from the screen.

Person B reads the information aloud.

Person C reformulates it for Person A.

Person D gives feedback on strategies used to clarify.

The message

At 1135 on 15 May 2016, the passenger vessel Surprise suffered hull damage and started flooding when it grounded at Western Rocks, Isles of Scilly; all 48 passengers were safely evacuated to shore. The flooding was contained by the vessel's own bilge pumps and it returned to harbour under its own power.

(MAIB Investigation report 14/2017 www.gov.uk/maib)

Reflection

What clarification strategies were used?

Active listening

“For optimal efficiency in ELF communication, it is not enough that speakers adjust their pronunciation. Listeners need to be more flexible in interpreting what they hear.”

(Walker, 1996, p. 88)

Discuss

Imagine you are training a native speaker to chair international meetings in English. The participants of the meetings come from all over the world.

What advice would you give her / him?

Advice for native speakers

- Speak more clearly and slowly than usual
- Pause and emphasize key words
- Increase redundancy; i.e. repeat and paraphrase
- Avoid unnecessarily technical words, slang, idioms
- Restrict the range of your vocabulary
- Use short sentences
- Use transparent sentence structure; e.g., *He asked if he could leave*, not *He asked to leave*
- Avoid contractions, e.g., *I'll*, *shouldn't've*
- Use more yes/no questions
- Provide answers for the interlocutor to choose from, e.g., *We can set up the equipment in two ways: like this [...] and like that [...] Which do you prefer?*

And one final question

If accommodation is really so useful in successful ELF communication, how can I best incorporate it into my own training context?

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