

EXPLORING LEARNERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION: A CASE STUDY

Anna Maria De Bartolo

Department of Culture, Education and Society

University of Calabria (Italy)

Innovation in Language Learning Conference

11-12 November 2021

OUTLINE

Background to the study

Theoretical framework

The study

Methodology

Research design

Preliminary findings

Final considerations

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Explore students' perceptions towards culture and intercultural communication through ELF.

It is a follow-up of a previous study.

Analysis considered a larger sample to identify similarities/differences between 2 different groups.

Aim: gather insights into factors affect IC and the extent to which culture impacts on IC.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The relationship between culture and language has been extensively explored by scholars, e.g. Risager (2006, 2007).

Cultures and languages can be separated. There is nothing inherent in the language itself that carries “cultural baggage or cultural scripts” (2007).

As research into Global Englishes and ELF has shown, there is a huge variety in the way English is used and the “cultural scripts” through which English linguistic forms operate.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Culture as connected to transcultural flows (Pennycook, 2007).

Cultural and linguistic practices are in a constant “flow”, moving from one context to another, cutting across and through nationally-defined cultures and drawing on multiple linguistic and cultural resources which are constantly adapted and changed in the process (Risager 2006, 2007; Pennycook 2007).

“Translocal” spaces and “translingual” practices (Canagarajah 2013) which characterize plurilingual communicative practices.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In these contexts, norms of communication are not well-defined and established, rather they are open to change, negotiation and mediation.

“a complex adaptive system, which emerges bottom-up from interaction of multiple agents in speech communities...rather than a static system composed of top-down grammatical rules or principles” (Larsen-Freeman 2011: 49).

Culture and language are “nested systems, systems within systems, which mutually co-evolve with each influencing and adapting to the other and with the boundaries between them as fuzzy and blurred” (Baker, 2015).

THE STUDY

PARTICIPANTS AND SETTINGS

The study investigates 2 groups of participants.

Group 1: 168 respondents from different cultural/linguistic backgrounds studying at the University of Calabria (Italy). 153 NNEs

Group 2: 58 respondents from target-language environments (USA and Canada). 40 NEs and 18 NNEs

An online questionnaire was composed and used as a research instrument to collect quantitative data.

METHODOLOGY

The first part of the questionnaire is a preliminary section identifying students' language background.

Participants were asked to indicate whether they are native or non-native English speakers.

Native speakers specified which variety of English (NV e.g. British/American English or NNV e.g. Indian, Singapore, African, Malaysian, etc.).

The second section of the questionnaire includes 9 items aimed at investigating students' awareness of the relation between language and culture.

1. Culture and language are closely linked.
2. Language is culture.
3. A language represents a specific culture with its world views, values and beliefs.
4. The English language is linked to English culture only.
5. Cultures and specific languages can be separated (for example, the English language can be separated from British culture).
6. In multicultural settings, negotiation strategies (confirmation checks, clarification requests, paraphrasing, repetitions, code-mixing and so on), contribute to achieve effective communication in English.
7. English used in multicultural settings enables speakers to share their different cultures.
8. In order to communicate effectively, it is important to understand the influence of culture on communication.
9. In order to communicate effectively, it is necessary to know the culture of the people you are communicating with. (adapted from Baker's study, 2015).

Survey mean to ensure anonymity so students did not feel pressure.

Participants were required to record their responses on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree.

The third and final section of the survey includes 6 items which specifically address the factors that may facilitate successful IC.

10. Knowing about the way other non-native English speakers use English.

11. Knowing about the culture of the non-native English speakers you are communicating with.

12. Knowing about the culture of native English speaking countries.

13. Having a native-like pronunciation.

14. Using correct native-like grammar.

15. Knowing about the relationship between language and culture.

RESEARCH DESIGN

American and Canadian universities are known to promote globalization and welcome staff who are NNEs

For many students, classes at universities are their first major exposure to people from other countries and to non-native English speech.

Studies suggest that there is a positive correlation between students' attitudes towards non-native English speech and their familiarity to it (Kang and Rubin 2009).

RESEARCH DESIGN

investigate whether higher exposure to non-native varieties of English and more direct involvement in multicultural academic communities may lead to more or less positive attitudes towards IC.

Hypothesis: second group is more exposed to multicultural contexts, to non-native speech, more aware of issues affecting successful IC and more willing to accommodate intercultural misunderstandings.

ANALYSIS

The analysis investigated comparison of mean scores in the two sample groups to identify similarities or differences between learners' responses in terms of attitudes.

Being the sum of the sample considered larger than 100, a two tailed normal distribution Z was applied ($H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2$, versus $H_1: \mu_1 \neq \mu_2$, $\alpha = 0,05$, $Z_{\alpha/2} = +/- 1,96$) and statistically significant differences observed (Bohrnstedt, Knoke 1994).

Table 1 MEANS CALCULATED FOR THE FIFTEEN VARIABLES IN THE TWO GROUPS

Variables	Group 1	Group 2
Q1	3,99	4,41
Q2	4,06	4,03
Q3	3,86	3,64
Q4	2,22	1,71
Q5	3,14	3,38
Q6	3,92	3,64
Q7	4,19	3,60
Q8	3,92	4,12
Q9	3,68	4,12
Q10	3,57	4,16
Q11	3,62	4,16
Q12	3,61	3,76
Q13	3,38	3,16
Q14	3,73	3,36
Q15	3,79	3,98

**TABLE 2 A TWO TAILED NORMAL DISTRIBUTION CALCULATED FOR FIFTEEN
CORRESPONDING
VARIABLES IN THE TWO GROUPS**

Group 1 N.=168	Group 2 N=58	For $\alpha=0,05$, $z_{\alpha/2}=+/- 1,96$	
Q1	Q1	-3,24	Reject H_0
Q2	Q2	0,16	Accept H_0
Q3	Q3	1,32	Accept H_0
Q4	Q4	3,56	Reject H_0
Q5	Q5	-1,37	Accept H_0
Q6	Q6	1,95	Accept H_0
Q7	Q7	4,22	Reject H_0
Q8	Q8	-1,38	Accept H_0
Q9	Q9	-2,71	Reject H_0
Q10	Q10	-4,72	Reject H_0
Q11	Q11	-3,87	Reject H_0
Q12	Q12	-0,92	Accept H_0
Q13	Q13	1,38	Accept H_0
Q14	Q14	2,29	Reject H_0
Q15	Q15	-1,41	Accept H_0

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

FACTORS AFFECTING IC

Questions 10 (*Knowing about the way other non-native English speakers use English*), question 11 (*Knowing about the culture of the non-native English speakers you are communicating with*) and question 9, (*In order to communicate effectively it is necessary to know the culture of the people you are communicating with*), present higher mean scores in the second group with statistical significant differences observed.

FACTORS AFFECTING IC

These results suggest participants' positive attitudes (*from group 2*) towards their interlocutors' different cultures and the crucial role culture plays on communication.

This idea is reinforced in question 1, *Culture and language are closely linked*, with higher mean scores in group 2 and statistical significant difference observed.

Respondents from group 2 seem to show higher tolerance of the way NNS use English in interaction which is likely to be considered an important factor to achieve communication.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS – CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

Question 3, *A language represents a specific culture with its world views, values and beliefs*, presents, on the contrary, higher mean scores in group 1 with statistical significant difference.

students who have less opportunities to experience a real ELF communicative contexts are more likely to view languages as attached to specific national cultures which reflect those values and beliefs.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

The idea of languages as crossing borders and transcending well-defined cultures is not revealed in group 1 responses.

while empirical studies have largely highlighted that English as a lingua franca is “hybrid” and “de-territorialized”, ELF transcends national borders and draws on cultural flows and multiple linguistic resources that are modified and recreated during interaction (Baker 2015, Canagarajah 2013, Pennycook 2007).

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Participants from group 1 seem to be more aware that negotiating strategies (code-mixing, clarification requests, comprehension checks, paraphrasing and so on) used to achieve mutual understanding are helpful to negotiate meaning in intercultural interaction (question 6)

and that English used in multicultural settings enables speakers to share their different cultures (question 7). In question 7 a significant difference is revealed.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Significant differences are also observed in question 14, *Using correct native like grammar*, which presents slightly higher mean scores in the first group.

Question 13, *Having a native-like pronunciation*, also reveals higher scores in the first group though no statistical significance observed.

Students from groups 2 who are likely to be more familiar with ELF environments, do not seem to consider the use of standard British/American grammar or native pronunciation a relevant factor in facilitating IC.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Question 4, *English language is linked to English culture only*, presents slightly higher mean scores in group 1 with a statistical significant difference observed

reduced learners' exposure to English in multicultural settings may lead to a lower awareness of the diversity of English and its connections with a variety of cultural settings which transcend the British borders.

CONCLUSIONS

Results seem to suggest that culture and language play an important role in enhancing intercultural communication

data highlight that engaging with different cultures and different varieties of English may contribute to successful intercultural communication

Students living and studying in real ELF contexts where English is LF for intercultural communication, seem to be more aware of non-native English use in IC and more willing to accept and embrace different forms of English

PEDAGOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Studying how learners perceive intercultural communication issues may raise language teachers' awareness of the need to incorporate intercultural communication, which is often relegated to a «fifth» and last skill, after the other four: listening, reading, writing and speaking, have been covered.

Embracing intercultural communication in the classroom may open students new doors, encourage them to enlarge their perspectives and experiment what communication actually entails in the multifaceted English world where cultural diversity and unconventional language norms allow for new encounters and deeper understanding.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Intercultural communication should have a fundamental role in the language classroom

as ELF studies have demonstrated, the majority of interactions through English occur among NNES who, by sharing their different cultures, successfully communicate their message across

essential to provide our learners with a realistic and meaningful communicative model and with the necessary competence to function in diverse and changing cultural contexts which, most of the time, are far removed from the standard, NS model teaching materials present.

REFERENCES

- Baker W. 2015, *Culture and identity through English as a Lingua Franca: rethinking concepts and goals in Intercultural Communication*, de Gruyter, Berlin/Boston.
- Bohrnstedt G. W. and Knoke D. 1994, *Statistics for Social Data Analysis*, F.E. Peacock Publisher Inc., Itasca, Ill.
- Canagarajah S. 2013, *Translingual Practice: Global Englishes and Cosmopolitan Relations*. London, Routledge.
- Kang O. and Rubin D.L. 2009, *Reverse Linguistic Stereotyping: Measuring the effect of listener expectations on speech evaluation*, "Journal of Language and Social Psychology", 28, pp. 441-456
- Larsen-Freeman D. 2011, *A complexity theory approach to second language development/acquisition*, Atkinson D. (ed.). *Alternative approaches to second language acquisition*, Abingdon, Routledge, pp. 48-72.
- Pennycook A. 2007, *Global Englishes and transcultural flows*, Routledge, London.
- Risager K. 2006, *Language and culture: global flows and local complexity*, Multilingual Matters, Clevedon.
- Risager K. 2007, *Language and cultural pedagogy*, Multilingual Matters, Clevedon.

Thank you!

Grazie!