Troublesome multimodal multiliteracy development for global citizenship in international intercultural exchanges: the MexCo project case study

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Abstract

The paper reports on the troublesome knowledge encountered by undergraduate students engaging with a large-scale online intercultural learning project underpinned by cycles of action research: MexCo (Mexico-Coventry), involving staff and students from the Universidad de Monterrey (UDEM) in Mexico and Coventry University (CU) in the UK. It proposes that undergraduate students need to be supported in

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developing intercultural communicative competence skills for these exchanges. It argues that such rules of online engagement, or "cyberpragmatics", defined by Yus as the skill in understanding others' intended meanings in computer-mediated communication (2011) should be integrated into the Higher Education curriculum to support students with developing global citizenship competences.

A distinctive feature of this project is that "expert students" are working with staff to analyse the data that is emerging (such as the analysis of the online interactions) and to co-design the new tasks aimed at supporting the development of intercultural communicative online competencies in each iteration of the project, in line with the role-reversal threshold-concept and action-research-informed pedagogical model that emerged from the PhD work carried out by Orsini-Jones in previous curricular interventions. Intercultural Communicative Competence in online exchanges is emerging a threshold concept. (N.B. Parts of this paper have appeared in previously published work).

Key words: Online Intercultural Learning (OIL), Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), Cyberpragmatics, Threshold Concept (TC)

Background

I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 287)

Michael Bakhtin wrote about *otherness*, with particular reference to the different characters in a novel whom he sees as providing a 'polyphony' of different voices and perspectives. Although Bakhtin's analysis is applied to literature, his focus on dialogue, language, culture and the formation of the *self* (as highlighted in Hall, Vitanova, & Marchenkova, 2005) resonates with the current Higher Education (HE) focus on the development of intercultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence for global citizenship.

Cousin (2010, 2012) argues that although the mission statements of many universities across the world include references to the competence of 'global citizenship', there are conflicting agendas driving its fostering within HE curricula in the United Kingdom (UK). In the discussion relating to the development of intercultural competencies (e.g. Intercultural Competencies, Higher Education Academy, 2014), there would appear to be on the one hand a neoliberal stress on 'global citizenship' for the purpose of employability in the world of business that is often inspired by Hofstede's *Dimensions of National Culture* from the 70s (Hofstede, 1980). This approach can essentialise, generalise, classify and over-simplify, and is perceived by many to be too narrow to be applicable to the postmodern, post- World-Wide-Web context (e.g. Cousin, 2010; 2012; Godwin-Jones, 2013, p.3).

On the other hand others stress the powerful postmodern cultural complexity that globalisation has brought about, with the additional 'spin' afforded by technologies which are enabling an ever-expanding multiplicity of multimodal narratives and textualities that students must become acquainted with and master in order to be able to critically read the world. Kumaravadivelu (2012) argues that we are experiencing an unprecedented intercultural global context where "cultures are in closer contact now than ever before and influencing each other in complex and complicated ways. This development is creating a global cultural consciousness, and along with it creative and chaotic tensions that both unite and divide people" (2012, p.4). Hemmi, Bayne, & Land (2009), quoting Barnett (2005), add their perception of the extra layer of globalised digital complexity that academia has to face: "the communicative landscapes opened up by social media can be spaces of strangeness and troublesomeness to the academy, both epistemologically and ontologically" (2009, p.29).

The challenge for educators in HE is to encourage students to become 'critically operational' in such a complex world and to equip them with the multimodal multiliteracies necessary to 'read' this world (Orsini-Jones, 2013; 2015). According to Barnett (2014), the 'meta-competence' that could enable students in HE to cope with what he defines as "supercomplexity" is "flexibility", which he understands as "a theme – a 'trope' – for imagining and then realising quite new potentials that may be glimpsed for the student as a *person-in-the-making*" (2014, p. 74). He addresses the

question of what forms of flexibility the idea of the student as 'a global citizen' might call for and proposes that that in order to develop global citizenship skills in students, academics must embrace "a pedagogy of some daring, of openness, and of challenge, and even of some risk, in inviting students to become citizens of the world, a pedagogy that is imaginative at once in curricula, approaches to teaching and in the manner opened up for student development (*ibid.*)". Picking up "Barnett's gauntlet", this chapter illustrates how both tutors and students involved in a large-scale international intercultural exchange between the United Kingdom and Mexico – the *MexCo* (Mexico-Coventry) project - are engaging in joint curricular activities that, as hinted by Barnett, are taking them out of their comfort zones and challenging them. It discusses how staff and students are engaging with critical global citizenship confronting their own 'otherness' through a dialogue with others. The chapter also explore how the *MexCo* project addresses the need to develop the intercultural digital literacies necessary for both academia and for the world of work, in keeping with institutional priorities in the UK and in Mexico.

The initial data collected are yielding interesting results that would appear to indicate that more work is needed in the area of online "rules of engagement", or "cyberpragmatics", defined by Yus (2011) as the skill in understanding others' intended meanings in computer-mediated communication. It is proposed here that cyberpragmatics in academic and professional settings is a troublesome new genre that needs to be researched further, particularly when using English as a *lingua franca* with speakers/writers who might not be fully aware of how their intended intercultural meaning is going to be "read".

The *MexCo* Project September 2013 - November 2014

The intercultural international project discussed here is *MexCo* (Mexico-Coventry), an ongoing large-scale threshold-concept-informed action-research project that started in academic year 2011-2012 (Orsini-Jones *et. al.,* 2015). The project was originally between the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* and Coventry University (hence the acronym *MexCo*). Since academic year 2013 the *Universidad de Monterrey* became the partner in Mexico, as the academic partners from UNAM

could not carry on with the project. In academic years 2012-2014 an online learning consultant from the University of Warwick also supported the implementation of the project. MexCo received funding from the Higher Education Academy.

MexCo originated as a tandem language learning exchange (English/Spanish), but then its scope became wider and English became the *lingua franca* used for a series of intercultural tasks designed in collaboration with the partners, as the majority of the students involved where not studying languages, but English Literature, Linguistics and Creative Writing (in the UK) and Medicine, Media Studies, Art, Architecture and Business Studies (in Mexico). This paper reports on how the lessons learnt in the previous iterations of the project (Orsini-Jones *et. al*., 2015) were integrated into the phase of the project that took place between August 2014 and November 2014. This latter phase involved 156 first-year students, two undergraduate student researchers/mentors, one learning technologist and four members of staff at Coventry University (CU - UK), Department of English and Languages, and 114 students from a range of years of study (first, second and third) and four members of staff at the *Universidad de Monterrey (UDEM - Mexico), Dirección de Programas Internacionales.* In terms of demographics, the two institutions involved differ considerably: Coventry University is a post-1992 inner-city university with a strong tradition of widening participation. UDEM is a private Catholic university located in one of the wealthiest areas in Monterrey.

A distinctive feature of this project is that it is integrated into the summative assessment of the relevant syllabi in both the UK and Mexico. At CU the project is integrated into the syllabus and assessment of a mandatory academic skills module on the English and Languages courses: *Introduction to Studying English and Languages at University* (worth 10 of 120 credits in the first year). At Coventry University a BA Honours degree normally consists of three hundred and sixty credits, one hundred and twenty per year. Each student normally takes the equivalent of six twenty credit modules (roughly corresponding to subjects on their course) per year. The aims and summary of the module under discussion are as follows:

The aims of this module, which is the first in a series of three, are to prepare students for academic study at degree level by discussing and practising academic writing, group project work, digital and presentation skills.

The module will enhance students' awareness of how these academic skills can develop into professional competencies and also provide information on how to maximise their university experience for future graduate employment.

*The module will also introduce students to intercultural international communication to foster the development of the graduate competence of global citizenship (*Module Information Directory, 2014*).*

The outcome relevant to the international exchange is that students should: "Demonstrate the ability to work as part of an international team to create an intercultural digital project" (Module Information Directory, 2014). For the students at CU, 50% of the assessment of the module consists of the collaborative design of the intercultural digital learning object with peers in Mexico (30% of the mark) and in the face-to-face group presentation of said object (20% of the mark).

In Mexico, at UDEM, the intercultural collaborative tasks form part (40% of the mark) of the assessment portfolio for module *Competencias Interculturales 1,* offered as an option to students attending different levels of their degree courses, but which must be taken by students planning to engage in overseas mobility. Its summary is as follows:

Nowadays there is a need for professionals to have well developed intercultural competences, so that they can operate effectively in a globalised world. This course provides training at postgraduate level in intercultural competence through experiential learning and reflection, working towards the development of intercultural awareness.

And the competences developed are:

1.   Knowledge and appreciation of their own culture and its history.

2.   Respect for individual differences and an openness and tolerance towards diverse ways of life and ways of thinking.

3.   Ability to form relationships with people from different backgrounds and in different contexts.

4.   Ability to critically evaluate different sources of information and make use of a range of tools enabling computer mediated communication.

The project is supported by a tailor-made and password-protected *Moodle* Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) website managed by CU with the support of a learning technologist. The 'look and feel' of the VLE has developed in action-research cycles involving both staff and students from 2011 to 2014. For example, the Mexican partners (both staff and students) gave negative feedback on the 'linear' way in which the information was displayed in the first *Moodle* environment (Figure 1, VLE's version 1). So it was re-designed in a 'tiled' layout (Figure 2) that was easier to navigate and afforded a more structured approach to task design.

Although it is necessary to operate within the 'safety' of the VLE when carrying out research to adhere to ethics procedures at Coventry University and to the Data Protection Act, participants also utilise email and social media (e.g. a *Facebook* page set up by the partners - see Figure 3, *Skype, Instagram* and *WhatsApp)* to interact, interview each other and share files. Communication is mainly asynchronous on the VLE's fora, due to the six-hour difference between the two countries, but students are also given the option to use an in-built synchronous chat in which they can record their exchanges if they so wish. While in 2013-2014 the exchange was carried out over a period of ten weeks, in 2014-2015 it was agreed to concentrate it into five. Students at CU have to complete the four dialogic intercultural tasks and collate them as a multimedia interactive set of pages (a reflective intercultural learning object) with the e-Portfolio *Mahara*, while students at UDEM carry out the tasks as self-standing ones.

Figure 1.   *MexCo OpenMoodle* Environment 2011-2013

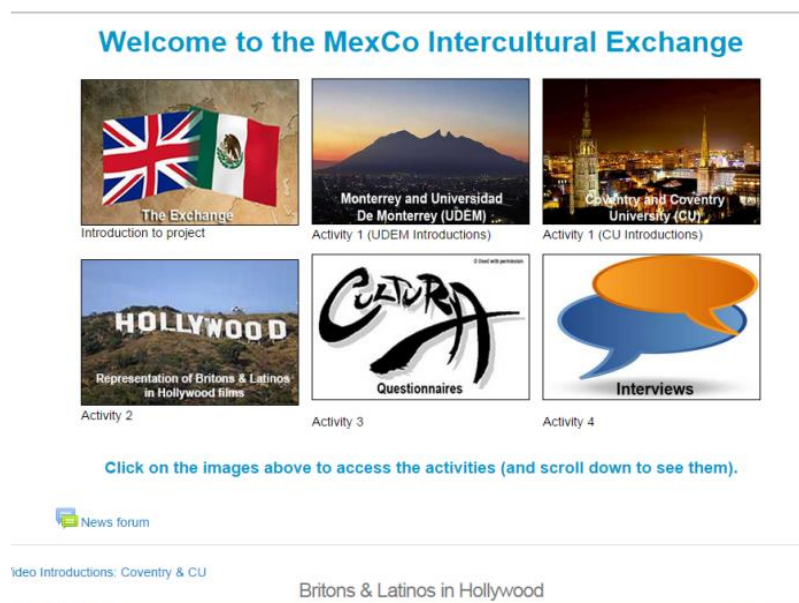**Figure 2.**   *MexCo OpenMoodle* Environment 2014

Figure 3.   "*Competencias Interculturales*" (Intercultural Competences), Facebookclosed group page set up by UDEM staff

A distinctive feature of this project is that "expert students" are working with staff to analyse the data that is emerging and to co-design the new tasks in each iteration of the project, in line with the role-reversal threshold-concept and action-research-informed pedagogical model that emerged from the PhD work carried out by Orsini-Jones in previous curricular interventions. This enables the tutors to see their practice "through the looking glass" of their expert students' eyes and to adjust it accordingly (Orsini-Jones, 2013).

The Intercultural Tasks

As previously discussed by Orsini-Jones (2015), the *MexCo* project takes a grounded and experiential problem-based approach to the development of intercultural awareness and includes tasks that, as suggested by Liddicoat and Scarino (2013, pp.57-59), promote:

- Active construction
- Making connections
- Social interaction
- Reflection

- Responsibility

These tasks are aimed at raising students' intercultural awareness with a focus on discourse. As argued by Wendt (2003, p. 97), cultures constitute themselves dynamically in discourse, but discourses are always structured hegemonically. So students must learn how to deconstruct discourse, as all cultures are constructs. The collaborative Task 2 (stereotypes in films/adverts) provides an example of this. Most students from CU admitted having held beliefs about the 'national character' of people from Mexico, influenced by stereotypes that are based on often inaccurate and usually negative inferences accumulated over the course of history, and perpetuated and reinforced through the media, films and television. In order to 'debunk' the stereotypes, students are exposed to various examples of the way Hollywood has built stereotypes on Latinos, through a lecture by an expert on this topic (Dr Milagros López-Peláez Casellas, 2013) that is also available online in *OpenMoodle* for the Mexican students. For Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) to be properly developed, intercultural communicators do need to "examine and challenge generalisations or stereotypes, and suggest or present other viewpoints" (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002, p. 20). Task 2 illustrated below, that uses the lecture by López-Peláez Casellas as a starting point, helps students to realise this:

Collaborative Learning Activity 2: Representation of national stereotypes in films/adverts

o **Objective:** to think about and reflect on the way cultures can be 'constructed'

o **Resources needed:** computer or tablet or smart-phone, Internet connection, access to *YouTube*

GENERAL INFORMATION

o **Due date:** 10/11/2014

o **Mode:** Individual or Group/Online in class or at home

o **Activity Portfolio Value: 4 (CU)**

INSTRUCTIONS

A. Watch (or attend if at CU) the lecture on the representation of Latino people in Hollywood films.

A. Find clips illustrating how British/Mexican people are represented in Hollywood films and share them in discussion.

B. Reflect on what you have found in the relevant discussion forum attached to the task.

The *Cultura* task (Task 3, Figure 4), adapted from work by Furstenberg & Levet (2010), is also designed to stimulate a healthy discussion around 'otherness'. In this task students fill in word-association questionnaires and also complete sentences in different situations provided.

Students must respond to the questions in their native language and then the results, in bilingual format, are collated by tutors, translated wherever necessary and posted in the relevant forum in *OpenMoodle,* where students can compare, analyse and discuss them.

Figure 4.   Sentence completion CU 2014-2015 "A good teacher is someone who…" (selected)

The e-tasks have been designed to offer participants the opportunity to develop the following multimodal and multilingual multiliteracies:

- Intercultural opportunities: analysis/comparison/debate;

- Linguistic opportunities: editing/translating/creating/discussing (both oral and written);

- Cyberpragmatic opportunities: intercultural online discourse analysis of the forum exchanges and replies/netiquette exercises;

- Multimedia Learning Object Digital Design (using the e-portfolio *Mahara* and *YouTube*); and

- Reflective and metareflective individual and group opportunities (commenting on one's experience/recording progress).

Methodology

In line with threshold concept pedagogy (Meyer & Land, 2003), staff reflected on issues that they had perceived to be troublesome in terms of intercultural awareness development. The action-research-supported model of threshold concept pedagogy designed by Orsini-Jones (Cousin, 2009, pp. 209-212) was then applied: "expert students" collaborated with staff to identify troublesome knowledge so that their peers could be supported in overcoming "stumbling blocks" in their intercultural learning journey.

The data collected to date (2014) is primarily qualitative, but it is expected that a quantitative analysis will be carried out with corpus linguistics tools to identify the intercultural themes and to classify the discourse features of online interaction that are emerging. Students' perceptions of their experiences are being evaluated through the analysis of the online exchanges and their completed tasks. In 2013-2014 semi-structured interviews were carried out at the end of the exchange (self-selected students). The interviews were conducted in small groups and around 15%

of all students took part in them in December 2013. All but one of the students who volunteered were from the UK. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and inputted into the qualitative data analysis software *Nvivo* to identify themes of relevance. Ethics clearance was obtained in compliance with the ethics governance guidelines at Coventry University.

The reflections that the "expert students" shared with staff informed the design of the second phase of the project with UDEM (August 2014-November 2014). As previously mentioned, this is in keeping with the 'role-reversal' threshold-concept-informed action-research model developed by Orsini-Jones (Figure 6 below, Orsini-Jones, 2013). The expert students' reflections from academic year 2013-2014 fed into the creation of the new collaborative tasks in 2014-2015 and the expert students also participated in all the *MexCo* project team meetings.

In terms of task design, a lesson was learnt through the joint staff/student reflection that caused a pedagogical 'U-turn'. In the effort to abandon the role of the 'sage on stage', empower learners and facilitate agency of all parties involved, the team had originally embraced a bottom-up approach and left students a considerable amount of choice and freedom in terms of topics to cover and tasks to carry out (Orsini-Jones *et. al.,* 2015). In the rather chaotic pedagogical scenario that followed, it became clear that when the development of multiliteracies at a distance is involved, a very careful scaffolding plan is needed. In the subsequent action-research cycles the expert students also acted as online mentors to facilitate communication within the VLE, delivered papers with staff (e.g. Bescond *et. al.,* 2014; Boylan, Bescond & Lloyd, 2014) and designed online help materials for the project.

Figure 6.   The Role Reversal Model of Threshold Concept Pedagogy in

Languages and Linguistics (Orsini-Jones, 2013)

Role-reversal model of threshold concept
pedagogy in languages and linguistics
(© Orsini-Jones 2011)
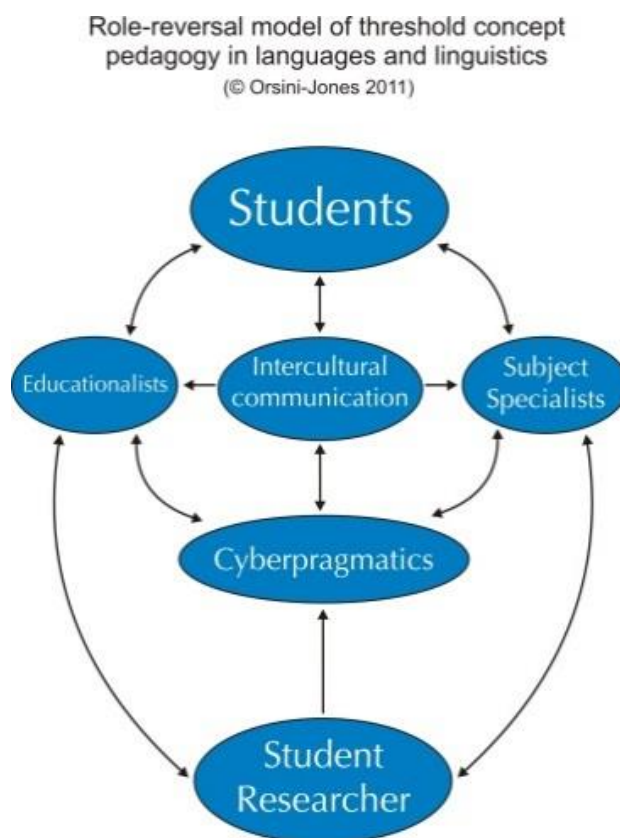
Reflections on the interim data collected

Problematic issues of a cyberpragmatic nature

Students' work and feedback would appear to indicate that the project has achieved
its purpose of raising their awareness of different cultures and respecting them, while
at the same time deepening their understanding of their own (Semi-structured
interviews December, 2013):

  It was interesting to learn about their culture but also to look at ours from their
  perspective.

> *Before I didn't have a huge awareness of different countries and their
> cultures…you hear about them…but you don't have a first-hand experience of it
> from their own perceptions…*

> *I found an opportunity to see how other people, living in another country, think,
> live, the kind of interests they have. When you understand other cultures, you start
> understanding your own culture even more and also value it more*

The data emerging from the analysis of the students' tasks and interactions online
would appear to indicate that "Intercultural Communicative Competence" (ICC) in
online exchanges could be a threshold concept: *"Threshold concepts lead not only to
transformed thought but to a transfiguration of identity and adoption of an extended
discourse"* (Meyer & Land, 2005, p. 375). Tutors need to create learning activities
designed to support students to come to terms with the epistemological (online
'languaging' can be challenging as it does not have the support of gestures and other
body language features that support communication) and ontological (for example
challenge to personal beliefs about others, willingness to engage with others) this
concept presents. As discussed by Meyer and Land, liminal oscillation manifests
itself through language. In the *MexCo* exchanges the students' 'stuttering' is evident
in their lack of online interactional competences, in their inability to distinguish online
genres in intercultural communication and in their lack of *netiquette* awareness both
in their native language and/or in the target language studied (if/when applicable).

The reflections of one of the expert students, who experienced the project in his first
year and subsequently became a mentor in his second and final years, were of
fundamental importance in the identification of this threshold concept. In 2013-2014
he noticed that an area of difficulty was online interaction in the fora and proposed
that more active interventions should be put in place to support his peers further
with:

- Gauging the correct level of formality**;**
- Developing ability to switch between registers and genres – who is the
  intended recipient?
- Skilfully interpreting intended meanings**;**

- Negotiating the balance between spoken conversation and written communication.

The above areas of troublesomeness were also mentioned by students during one of the semi-structured interviews that took place in December 2013 when they were asked why they struggled to maintain interaction online (P=participant):

P1: *We didn't really have a lecture –*
P3: *- on this.*
P4: *Yeah.*
P5: *On, on, on communi-, on communicating with, with the Mexicans*

As the student experts did not appear to have problems themselves with this area of interaction, they were asked by staff to support the creation of dedicated activities (lectures and exercises), to provide the first-year students with practice on *netiquette* and online interaction. When asked why he thought he was able to maintain interaction flow online, one of these expert students stated that:

Overall, I think what helped me maintain discussions was:

- *bearing in mind that I was communicating with people whose first language wasn't English*
- *bearing in mind that the point of going on the MexCo forums was to talk to people*
- *having an interest in learning about other cultures*
- *having an interest in grammar and helping people with it*
- *remembering that I was, informally, an ambassador for both CU and the UK, which meant I aimed **to be polite** and friendly towards other participants (our stress)*

More attention was therefore paid to the discourse features of effective online interaction and cyberpragmatics in the 2014-2015 cycle. Students were provided with examples of successful and unsuccessful forum threads from the previous year and asked to identify the features that made them successful (or not). Students

noticed that successful posts had linguistic features that demonstrated interactional engagement and tended to both express an interest in the other culture and share information about their own. It seems that some students struggled with the concept of adapting existing socio-linguistic registers to create a register that was appropriate for use in the fora. The ability to switch between linguistic registers and genres is a fundamental competence for global citizenship in contexts that are heavily reliant on the Internet for communication purposes. Students need to develop cyberpragmatic competence for global citizenship and, this includes gauging the appropriate levels of formality in their written communication through different media.

In terms of the multiliteracies addressed, the starting point was originally the table by Helm and Guth below (Figure 7, 2010, p. 74, edited and used with permission).

Figure 7.   Framework for the goals of Telecollaboration 2.0

Framework for the goals of Telecollaboration 2.0
Helm and Guth 2010:74

New Online Literacies	ICC	Foreign Language Learning
Operational: The "technical stuff"		
Computer literacy Information literacies New media literacies	*Savoir apprendre/faire:* Skills of discovery and interaction *Savoir comprendre:* ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to one's own	Spoken production Spoken interaction Written production Reading Listening Codeswitching
Operational: Attitude: the "ethos stuff"		
Willingness to explore, learn from, participate in, and collaborate and share in online communities	*Savoir-etre:* attitude of openness and curiosity	Autonomy Motivation Willingness to communicate
Cultural		
Knowledge of literacy practises and appropriate ways of communicating online Propositional knowledge of topic	*Savoirs:* knowledge of social groups and their products and practices in own and other cultures; knowledge of the processes of interaction	Linguistic knowledge Sociolinguistic knowledge Pragmatic knowledge
Critical		
Critical Literacy Awareness	Critical Cultural Awareness	Critical Language Awareness

Helm and Guth refer to "telecollaboration" as this is normally the term used to define online intercultural learning in languages and linguistics (see O'Dowd, 2013a on this point). However, their table could also be applied to the use of English as a *lingua franca* in international exchanges that involve students who are not studying languages but who are from a variety of linguistic backgrounds. It highlights the multiplicity of competencies needed for online interaction. It also illustrates how the online global connectivity afforded by online intercultural learning expands the definition of intercultural communicative competence (ICC, the Byram's "savoirs" at the centre) to include online literacies and netiquette, i.e. cyberpragmatics as defined by the above mentioned Yus (2011).


Online 'cacophony'

The trouble with online interaction is not just affecting students in project *MexCo*. It could be argued that what was hoped to be an online polyphony (to quote Bakhtin again) is often turning into online cacophony. Critical incidents relating to communication (or rather – miscommunication) are also occurring amongst staff. What is becoming apparent is that the 'languaging' that the tutors involved are using for the project has different semantic connotations in the UK and in Mexico. Even if the words used are the same, they are not interpreted in the same way. It is not just a translation issue, but more a Saussurian mismatch of 'langue' and 'parole' in English as a *lingua franca*. For example, the pedagogical interpretation of certain expressions and words, such as 'digital literacies', 'task', 'student-centred' and 'student autonomy' would appear to differ considerably in the two countries. We feel that more research is needed in this area of 'pedagogical intercultural issues' in online intercultural learning projects to better support tutors in their journey to become global citizens, even if some work in this area has been carried out by O'Dowd (2013b). Web 2.0 platforms can amplify the resonance of negative critical incidents as they make them more shareable and more 'visible', which can in turn escalate misunderstandings.

Critical incidents

A factor that would appear to create intercultural misunderstandings is the troublesome area of the baggage of 'tacit knowledge' (Perkins, 2006) that staff and students have, particularly in view of the fact that the two institutions involved are quite different in their demographics. Monterrey is still, to a large extent, steeped in national Mexican culture and students at UDEM are rather homogeneous in comparison with students at CU. The expectations that some partners have of Britain and British students (and vice-versa) are not normally met in reality, for example, and some problematic issues can ensue from this. See for example the unfortunate title of the *Mahara* e-portfolio below (Figure 9, 2013-2014). The critical incidents that occurred provided opportunities for critical intercultural reflection. Helm, Guth & Farrah argue that online intercultural exchanges should include practice of dialogic approaches to conflict, as demonstrated in their interesting work on an exchange between students in Italy and students in Palestine (2012).

Figure 9.   Critical Incident amplified by Web 2.0 tools
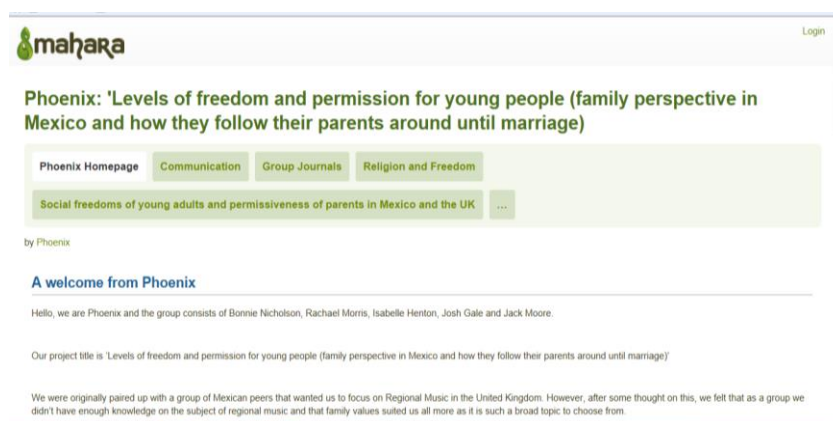
Emerging research questions

The research questions that are emerging from the data collected are the following:

1. Is the concept of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) for global citizenship a threshold concept?

1. Do we need to teach *netiquette* for global citizenship for online exchanges in English as a *lingua franca* as a new genre in HE?

2. What are the multimodal multiliteracies required for global citizenship in academic and professional settings?

3. How can tutors clarify pedagogical issues with their international partners when the underlying pedagogical assumptions and tacit knowledge are built on a very different teaching and learning *Weltanschauung*?

Sharifian and Jamarani claim that 'research into online politeness, or *netiquette*, is a rather novel branch of CMC research' (2013, p. 11). In the absence of the support of the paralinguistic features present in face-to-face communication, in online intercultural exchanges we need to re-explore Leech's 'politeness maxims'(1983): Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, Sympathy and raise students' awareness of linguistic norms and (cyber)pragmatic peculiarities.

Conclusion

Returning to the initial quote by Bakhtin, it is necessary to provide students in Higher Education with the necessary competencies to engage with others in a polyphonic, dialogic way, but in a dialogue that can contemplate 'constructive conflict'. This requires a multimodal and multiliteracy-oriented pedagogical approach, one which includes teaching the 'genre' of online interaction for academic and professional purposes. In keeping with Barnett's tenets on "flexibility" in an age of supercomplexity, the MexCo team believes that although there still are troublesome issues with cyberpragmatics that cannot be resolved in one academic year, following the systematic scaffolding of the intercultural tasks and the integration of the suggestions made by the expert students into the curricular intervention, at least most students have realised that, as suggested by Hall, quoted in Sercu:

> *'Intercultural competence' is a concept typical of postmodernist views of society,*
> *with their interest in cultural difference and the relationship to 'the Other', no*
> *matter whether this 'Other' is different from a national, ethnic, social, regional,*

professional or institutional point of view. All encounters always encompass interactions between the multiple identities of social actors and their perceptions of each other's identities. They are therefore always intercultural. Individuals are continually crossing cultural borders (Giroux,1992). They are in a constant process of 'becoming' as well as 'being' (Hall, 1990, p. 225 as cited in Sercu, 2002).

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