Negotiating intercultural awareness and language varieties online: case study UK-Mexico

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FES Z (UNAM)
What is MexCo?

VLE (Moodle)-supported international intercultural knowledge-transfer exchange project integrated into the curriculum

- Students and staff from Coventry University (Department of English and Languages)
- Students and staff at the Facultad de Estudios Superiores Zaragoza – FES Z (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México)
- Staff from the University of Warwick (Languages Centre).
- Funded by the Higher Education Academy UK (Teaching Development Collaborative Grant)
Moodle supported (dedicated Applied Research Centre area), three languages (E, S, F)

Aim 1: to develop intercultural communicative competence with learner-centred collaborative online learning

The study of Modern Languages and Cultures should include the agentification of the learner to enable them to make sense of their experience in a foreign language and culture (Vera López 2012:8)

Post-modern post-method approach adopted (Kumaravadivelu 2001): local contexts, local needs, transformational learning experience for all agents involved, metareflections
Aim 2

- To enhance all participants’ intercultural awareness and transferable graduate employment skills in a global context, while taking part in an online CMC exchange - or should we say Global Networked Learning? (Rubin 2012). Or Telecollaboration exchange? (O’Dowd 2010; Polisca 2011; Guth and Helm 2010; MacKinnon 2012)
Aim 2 – linked hypotheses

Is intercultural awareness a threshold concept?

Does the engagement with multilingual multiliteracies (digital and other) enhance intercultural awareness?

AND can the exchange help with embedding internationalisation in the DEL curriculum and support our students in becoming...
A vision of ‘graduate-ness’?
The ‘global graduate’

Able to recognise and value cultural difference

CU Mission Statement
We aspire to be a dynamic, global, enterprising university. We will work in partnership with external organisations through our research and engage our students as partners in a community of learning.
Underlying Principles for the Project

- Council of Europe: Developing the Intercultural Dimension in Language Teaching (Byram, Gribkova and Starkey 2002)
- Developing Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)
- Developing digital literacies
- Developing graduate competencies
Byram’s ICC components

- Knowledge (savoirs)
- Intercultural attitudes (savoir être)
- Skills of interpreting and relating (savoir comprendre)
- Skills of discovery and interaction (savoir apprendre/faire)
- Critical cultural awareness (savoir s’engager)
Byram’s model

• It lacks one key dimension of competence: *metacognitive strategies*. These include knowledge, conceptions and convictions regarding one’s own cognitive functioning as well as self-regulating mechanisms which help one to plan, direct and evaluate one’s own learning processes (Sercu 2004: 78)
More on Byram’s model

- Created in the 90s, does not contemplate global networked ICC (Guth and Helm 2010)
- It would appear to assume a ‘given’ underlying conceptualization of ‘culture’ that is EU-centric
- Initial reflections when studying exchanges in the MexCo forum: what is culture, whose culture?
New perspective: is Intercultural Communicative Competence a ‘Threshold Concept’?

…akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something. …It represents a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing something without which the learner cannot progress… As a consequence of comprehending a threshold concept there may thus be a transformed internal view of subject matter, subject landscape, or even world view…This transformation may be sudden or it may be protracted over a considerable period of time, with the transition to understanding proving troublesome (Meyer and Land, 2003:412).
Troublesome

the learners will often find it problematic
Intercultural critical incident G1

Hi I'm [name].
I am a Coventry University Student. Nice to meet you.
I am studying French and International Relations.

So we want to make a Blog about Coventry and the tourist attractions here. Is there anything in particular that you want to know about Coventry?

Speak to you soon!
Hasta luego mis amigos

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Hello [name]!
What I shouldn't miss from Coventry?, there are archaeological zones?

I hope to hear from you soon,
Greetings from México!

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Re: Hi!
by [name] on Sunday, 25 November 2012, 05:01 PM

No I mean things you like to do for fun like play football or maybe where you like to go for fun

Speak to you soon!
Ciao!
Transformative

once understood, its potential effect on student learning and behaviour is to occasion a significant shift in the perception of a subject.
HI
What's the culture like in Mexico? What tourist attractions do you have there? Do you like football? I Love it!
Some of my friends here at Coventry University and I have created a website about Coventry and the tourist attractions. We made it especially for you, the students in Mexico:
http://mahara.coventry.ac.uk/view/view.php?t=jaeJi1Ug6HG7XcmkEhZI
Let me know if you like it
Enjoy!
MexCo Pilot 24/5 – 28/7 2012: phase 2 based on the pilot

• Apart from ‘introductory posting’, pilot left to grow organically, emerging themes: Mexico/Mexico City music, movie, daily routine, travel, culture, likes and dislikes, food, sport, books, archeology (question how many dictated by tutors/syllabus)?

• Phase 2: tandem language learning, American and English, vegetarian issues, horror genre, traditions in November, politics and religion, way to effectively learn languages
(Inter)cultural perceptions – cultural ‘frames’

Es muy bueno poder hablar con personas de un país tan importante como Inglaterra y que esto me ayude a mi formación en el idioma es otro incentivo para hacerlo.

Cultural ‘frames’ (Gumperz and Roberts 1991)
Assessed task at CU (50% module mark): module 100DEL
Introduction to studying English and Languages at University

- The aims of this module are to prepare you for academic study at degree level by discussing and practising academic writing, group project work, digital and presentation skills.

- The module aims at enhancing your awareness of how these academic skills can develop into professional competencies and also provide information on how to maximise your university experience for future graduate employment.
Assessed task at CU (50% module mark): module 100DEL
Introduction to studying English and Languages at University

Some students from our partner University in Mexico (FESZ/UNAM) are planning to come to Coventry. Create a web-based Spanish/English (or French/English) guide (a learning object) to Coventry for them using the Mahara e-portfolio. The guide must include both academic and non-academic information. You need to consult the students from FESZ/UNAM on its design via Moodle (international exchange) and provide examples of how their input informed your project. You may include jointly created blogs in the project and discuss what you learnt from the experience. You will also need to keep an individual reflective record of your intercultural exchange (in terms of personal feelings, new knowledge and actions that stemmed from it) using the Mahara Project Journal tool.
Student-driven intercultural collaborative digital object design with Mahara 1

English Music, Television, Literature And Cinema - Michael Kelly

Music
In the 1960s, the Beatles revolutionised music in the UK with their style of rock/pop music. To date, they hold records for having the most number one albums in the UK, and are also the best-selling band of all time.

Nowadays, it is the likes of Tinie Tempah, Adele and Rita Ora who top the UK charts with their style of R&B, soul and pop music.

There has also been the growth of dubstep, a genre of electronic dance music, over the last few years, which is primarily played in nightclubs.

Cinema

Television

La televisión ha desarrollado mucho hasta que su creación en el Reino Unido en los años treinta. Ahora, el televisor tiene una elección de aproximadamente 450 canales diferentes, gracias a compañías de televisión tal como "Sky".

Durante los últimos diez años, los programas buscando nuevo talento en la industria de música ya han convertido más popular, y más frecuentes, en la televisión. Los programas tal como "The X Factor" y "Britain’s Got Talent" han atraído las audiencias grandes.

Además, más y más programas de tele-realidad han estado apareciendo en nuestras pantallas, tal como "Made In Chelsea" y "The Only Way Is Essex", donde las cámaras seguir las vidas de la gente joven y rico, aunque la mayoría de los programas tienen un argumento.

En el pasado, la mayoría de las emisiones británicas más conocido eran comedias, tal como "Fawlty Towers" y "Only Fools And Horses". Aunque estaban haciendo hace cuarenta y ocho años, ya están considerados como algunos de los mejores comedias de todo tiempo.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Midland Air Museum</strong></th>
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<td>The Midland Air Museum is a unique aerological collection. Started in 1957 by a small group of local aircraft enthusiasts as the Midland Aircraft Preservation Society (MAPS), they started to collect books, photographic and aircraft parts. The Museum now employs one full time Manager and three other permanent staff members but is lucky to rely upon a large volunteer workforce. An active youth programme is in place to bring young people into the restoration scene and countless hours of unpaid work by juniors as young as 14 up to senior citizens in their 80s have gone into establishing, maintaining and improving this, the Midland Air Museum. The Midland Air Museum is a registered Charity. The Charity’s stated aims are: “To advance the education of the public in the preservation of aircraft and aeronautical equipment of historical, technical or other public interest and in aviation generally.”</td>
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<th><strong>Lady Godiva</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Godiva</strong> (Old English: Godigifu, “god gift”), often referred to as Lady Godiva, was an 11th-century Anglo-Saxon noblewoman who, according to a legend dating back at least to the 13th century, rode naked through the streets of Coventry in order to gain a remission of the oppressive taxation imposed by her husband on his tenants. The name “Peeping Tom” for a voyeur originates from later versions of this legend in which a man named Tom had watched her ride and was struck blind or dead.</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Electric Railway Museum</strong></th>
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<td>The Electric Railway Museum is located on the edge of Coventry</td>
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Sample 4

English History and Tradition -  

Introduction
The history and traditions of England play an extremely important part in English culture. This is the history of England which makes the country what it is today.

Guy Fawkes and Bonfire Night
To understand the English tradition of bonfire night, we must first discover the story of Guy Fawkes. So who was he? Guy Fawkes was born to an immediate family of Protestants in April 1570. His mother's parents, however, were very strong Catholics. When Fawkes' father passed away, his mother also married a Catholic. Fawkes' future actions were thought to have been influenced by this early experience of Catholicism.

Fawkes was first approached by Thomas Wintour and asked to become part of the group of plotters, led by Robert Catesby, planning to assassinate King James I with gunpowder in order to bring James' daughter, Elizabeth, to the throne, in order to ensure that England remained a Catholic lead country.

Fawkes disguised himself as a servant within the houses of parliament and began obtaining gunpowder. After 16 months of planning, however, Fawkes was found two hours before the planned assassination, and was arrested on the 4th of November 1605, at midnight. He was tortured for two days until he confessed to plotting treason against King James I.

Halloween
Angéleterre fête Halloween le 31er d'Octobre toutes les années. Cette célébration, qui a le sens littéral de 'All Hallows Eve' est la veille de 'All Saints Day' qui est suivi par 'All Souls Day.' Tous ces jours ensemble commémorent les saints et les âmes qui ont recemment décédé. (Rogers 2002:11).

Image

Halloween cont.
Halloween is strongly linked with the idea of the supernatural. Over time traditions such as placing candles in hollowed out pumpkins with face shaped cut into them and dressing up as frightening characters have developed. Children often take part in the 'trick or treat' tradition in which they go house to house asking for sweets with the phrase 'trick or treat' in exchange for not causing trouble on their property; the 'trick' however is usually not acted upon.

Image

Queen Elizabeth II and The British Monarchy
Another important part of British culture is the British Monarchy. The current Queen (Elizabeth II), now eighty-six years old, celebrated her diamond jubilee (sixty years as a monarch) this year. [link to website]

The Queen was coronated on 2nd June 1953, and since then has 'introduced a new breed of dog known as the "dorgi" when one of Her Majesty's corgi was mated with a dachshund named Pippin which belonged to Princess Margaret.' has sat for 129 portraits' and 'has undertaken 251 official overseas visits, including 96 State Visits, to 116 different countries.' [link to website]

As one of the few countries to have a monarchy, many tourists come to England to visit castles and to discover the its history.

Image
Sports & Leisure

There are many sports which have been started by the English, and then spread worldwide, including badminton, cricket, croquet, football, field hockey, lawn tennis, rugby league, rugby union, table tennis and thoroughbred horse racing.

There are many major sports created by the English:

Tennis: The modern game of tennis originated in the UK in the 1870s (Tyzack, 2005) and after the creation of tennis, the sport spread across the upper-class English-speaking population. The most prestigious and oldest tournament in tennis is Wimbledon, which first took place in 1877, is the most prestigious tennis tournament in the world. With top players who compete there like Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal, world number 1 Novak Djokovic and current Olympic Gold Medallist Andy Murray.

Football is the biggest sport in England and it was created in England also then it spread across the world. The rules were first implemented in 1863 in the UK. And the UK also has the some of the oldest clubs in the world. Football in Britain is renowned for the intense rivalry between clubs and the passion of the supporters (Holl, Mason, 2000). The FA Cup is the biggest football cup competition in England, with English Premier League club Manchester United winning the most trophies.

Another big sport which was started in England is golf, it's not the most popular sport across the England with every person but it still has a large fan base in England and across the world. There are many top English players like Luke Donald, Justin Rose and Sir Nick Faldo.

Wimbledon

English Cuisine

* There are many English dishes that are popular throughout the country
* Tea and beer are typical drinks in England
* Roast beef is a food traditionally associated with the English
* The Full English Breakfast is a variant of the traditional British fried breakfast. The normal ingredients of a traditional full English breakfast are bacon, eggs, fried or grilled tomatoes, fried mushrooms, fried bread or toast, and sausage.
* The Sunday roast was once the most common feature of English cuisine. The Sunday dinner traditionally has roast potatoes (or boiled or mashed potatoes) accompanying a roasted joint of meat such as roast beef, lamb, pork, or a roast chicken and assorted vegetables, themselves generally boiled and served with a gravy.
* Sweet English dishes include apple pie, mince pie, spotted dick, stoned Eccles cakes, pancakes, sponge cake, Battenberg cake, Jaffa cakes, trifles, custard, and sticky toffee pudding.

Full English Breakfast

Famous Historic Landmarks in England

There are many very famous historic landmarks all across England for example The Tower of London, Stonehenge, Westminster Abbey, Roman Baths.

Stonehenge

Información sobre Stonehenge

- Stonehenge es un monumento prehistórico situado en el condado de Wiltshire, Inglaterra. Uno de los sitios más famosos del mundo. Stonehenge se compone de una configuración circular de grandes piedras verticales fijadas dentro de movimientos de tierras. Está en el centro de la urbanización más densa de los monumentos Neolítico y la Edad del Bronce en Inglaterra, incluyendo alrededor de cien tumbas.
- Tipo de piedra: sulfato de cobre, sarsen, Arenisca de Gales.
- Los arqueólogos creen que el monumento de piedra fue construido en cualquier lugar a partir de 3000 aC a 2000 aC. La datación por radiocarbono en 2006 sugirió que las primeras piedras fueron originadas en 2400 a 2200 aC (Morgan, Darvill, Wainwright, 2008), mientras que otra teoría sugiere que las piedras azules pueden haber sido utilizadas antes de 3000 aC.
Reconceptualising culture?

Mexican students may have a different conceptualisation of culture from that of the UK-based students

Towards a post-ICC for a globalised world?

Importance of contextualisation
Positive development: TEFL/Spanish online classes student to student

shopping cart shopping trolley
airplane aeroplane
parking lot car park
sidewalk pavement
color colour
traveling travelling
water-wings armbands

Some American spellings make more phonetic sense than the British ones, but I like the British ones better because I am used to them. However, I think 'water-wings' is more poetic than 'armbands' so we should adopt this one 😊

Your written English is very good. I only spotted a few mistakes.

"when I was a teenager I ask for money" (asked)
"in that moment I didn't think in the dead" (of)
"fortunately any important person for me had died"
(we would probably say 'fortunatly nobody important to me had died')

"Some Mexican people visit theirs dead" (their)
"the flowers and made shapes with they in the tombs, or they took they in flowerpots" (them)
"even a saw coca-colas in a tomb too" (I even saw coca-colas)
"like a show the affection" (like a show of affection/like to show the affection)
"I think that when I learn the British pronunciation any Mexican will understand me, because it is easier for Mexicans understand American
Issues arising

- Intercultural critical incidents (different approach to T&L)
- Need to set ‘ground rules’? But then whose rules?
- VLE(N)etiquette
- Technology misunderstanding issues
- Lack of time (all parties concerned)
- Time difference
What is culture?

• *Is the conceptualisation of culture a threshold concept per se?*
Value-added – positive note from tutor in Mexico

Promoting these types of intercultural communication helps students to overcome stereotypes about the cultures where the language they are studying is spoken as a native language and about the people who speak that language. In the case of my students they seem to be more confident using English, they seem to be more motivated because they want to be more fluent so that they can communicate with their new friends in England and in the same way they are happy that they have helped some Spanish students with problems in Spanish. Now learning English has a new meaning for my students because they can see a real purpose in learning this language. They have learned that people in general have similar needs (Email communication, 7/12/2012)
Final reflections

• Students (and staff) from FES Z – have posted a lot about the geography, history and traditions of Mexico/Mexico City, and have asked for similar information about Britain/Coventry.
• From their interlocutors at CU they may have got more and less culture than they bargained for.
• Byram et al. (2002): “How do I deal with learners’ stereotypes and prejudices?” “How do I overcome my own stereotypes and misconceptions?”
Selected Bibliographical References


More references


