

**Manuscript version: Author's Accepted Manuscript**

The version presented in WRAP is the author's accepted manuscript and may differ from the published version or Version of Record.

**Persistent WRAP URL:**

<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/153959>

**How to cite:**

Please refer to published version for the most recent bibliographic citation information. If a published version is known of, the repository item page linked to above, will contain details on accessing it.

**Copyright and reuse:**

The Warwick Research Archive Portal (WRAP) makes this work by researchers of the University of Warwick available open access under the following conditions.

Copyright © and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable the material made available in WRAP has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

**Publisher's statement:**

Please refer to the repository item page, publisher's statement section, for further information.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: [wrap@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:wrap@warwick.ac.uk).

# **Translating intercultural experiences into pedagogic insights: Shifts in language teachers' perceptions of English as a language for intercultural communication**

**Yipei Chen and Troy McConachy**

## **Abstract**

These days, many pre-service and in-service language English language teachers now complete at least part of their professional training overseas. There is, thus, an important question concerning the impact of intercultural encounters on teachers' perspectives towards the English language and the teaching of English. This paper reports on a study of how a small group of in-service teachers interpreted their experiences of intercultural communication in the UK whilst completing an MA TESOL degree, illuminating the nature of teachers' perceptions of language and culture and how teachers translated insights derived from reflection on experience into pedagogic insights for the teaching of English as a global language. The findings reveal that participants' views shifted away from highly normative conceptions of English language use as they recognised the variability and fluidity of communication in real-life intercultural encounters. Based on critical moments in their communication experiences, teachers articulate the importance of broadening their own learners' perspectives on diversity within the English language and helping them develop cognitive and attitudinal tools to interact appropriately with diverse others. The paper contributes to understanding of the facilitative potential of teachers' reflections on their own experiences of linguistic and cultural diversity in coming to formulate pedagogical ideals and concrete methodological possibilities.

**Keywords:** Intercultural, language, teacher, awareness, experience

## Introduction

With the spread of globalization and prevalence of intercultural interaction in many occupational and interpersonal contexts, pedagogical goals and practices within language education are increasingly being framed within an intercultural orientation. This means that there is an emphasis on developing learners and teachers who are sensitive to diverse ways of perceiving and using language and are able to consider the potential impact of cultural differences on meaning-making processes (Díaz, 2013; Kohler, 2015; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; McConachy, 2013; 2018). Recent work has emphasised the importance of processes of interpretation and reflection in helping learners develop a perspective on language that recognizes diversity in linguistic structure and use and is attuned to the different ways that assumptions about social relationships and normative behavior influence judgments of linguistic appropriateness (e.g., Liddicoat & Scarino 2013; McConachy & Liddicoat 2016). This involves close attention to patterns of linguistic variability, the cultural meanings that speakers tend to attribute to linguistic forms and practices, and ways that one's communicative preferences and underlying assumptions may be different to others. In this sense, the process of learning "entails a questioning of one's own and others' assumptions and positioning and consideration of intentions and expectations" across linguistic and cultural boundaries (Scarino, 2014:389).

The emphasis on interpretation and reflection in the learning of foreign languages has significant consequences for how we conceptualise the work of teachers, the nature of teacher knowledge, and potential contexts for teacher professional learning. Within an intercultural orientation to language education, the teacher's role as an intercultural mediator gains particular prominence (e.g., Kohler, 2020; Kramsch, 2020). That is, the teacher scaffolds learners' engagement with new linguistic forms and practices whilst assisting learners to make connections with their existing knowledge of languages and the cultural expectations that shape how languages are used. This is not something that can be achieved on the basis of a fixed pedagogical script, but is rather a deeply context-sensitive and personal activity that reflects teachers' own "interpretive framework of knowledge, understanding, practices, and values built over time" (Scarino, 2014: 394). The ways that teachers go about promoting engagement with linguistic and cultural diversity within the language classroom depends on teachers' perspectives on the nature of language and the interrelationships between language and culture (Kohler, 2020). This in turn is dependent on teachers' own experiences of professional learning, as well as their personalised understandings of past intercultural experiences. It is this latter aspect that we take up in this paper.

In this paper, we consider the role of teachers' experiences of intercultural communication as a source of professional learning. We report on a study of how a small group of in-service English language teachers completing MA degrees in the TESOL area at a UK university interpreted their experiences of new linguistic forms and practices within the English language and how teachers translated insights derived from reflection on experience into pedagogic insights for the teaching of English as a global language. We first review the literature on the role of overseas study experiences in teacher professional development.

### **The overseas study experience as a context for teachers' intercultural development**

Language teachers' own intercultural experiences have been identified as a potentially powerful source of personal and professional development, particularly experiences that are drawn from extended periods of residence in a target language environment (Kramsch & Zhang, 2019). This is confirmed by work in the field of teacher education which has highlighted the impact of sustained periods of study abroad and international work placements on the development of teachers' intercultural competence and teaching expertise (e.g. Cushner, 2007; He, Lundgren & Pynes, 2017; Marx & Moss, 2011; Rodriguez, 2011; Walters, Garii, & Walters, 2009). Across a variety of settings, direct experiences abroad have been confirmed as a catalyst for intercultural development among educators (Cushner, 2007), with teaching abroad having the most long-lasting impact (Walters et al., 2009). Experiences of professional learning in a foreign cultural environment can enable teachers to break cultural stereotypes and further realize how personal traits are influenced (but not determined) by the broader cultures they are from (Cushner, 2007). Importantly, overseas experiences can also have a transformative impact on teacher belief systems, contributing to teachers' professional development (Brindley et al., 2009). Göbel and Helmke (2010) find that EFL teachers with richer intercultural contacts create more non-prescriptive lessons that emphasize the dynamic nature of culture. In these lessons, students have more chances to compare cultures and express opinions, rather than absorbing static cultural information. Meanwhile, Rodriguez (2011) argues that there is a close relationship between teachers' personal and professional development, in that experiences of cultural diversity whilst abroad can have an impact on educational philosophies as well, enabling participants to grow as a person and as an educator. This is a crucial insight for this paper.

One pertinent criticism of the literature on the intercultural development of teachers is that little attention is given to language and the specific role that being immersed in a new cultural environment has on teachers' sensitivity to linguistic practices and the cultural meanings of different language forms. In other words, intercultural development is conceptualised primarily in terms of changes to

beliefs and attitudes. This may be due to the fact that many empirical studies have focused on teachers of other subjects rather than language teachers. In fact, to date, there has been little work that has focused specifically on how the experience of residing in a new linguistic and cultural environment shapes the professional knowledge base of language teachers. This is particularly problematic given the global spread of the English language and the fact that speakers of English exhibit much diversity not only in terms of language features (e.g. pronunciation, lexis etc) but also in terms of their perceptions of social relationships and preferred ways of indexing identity (Baker 2020).

Within language education, the nature of teachers' perspectives on language is often discussed through the notion of "language awareness" (Svalberg 2007) or "teacher language awareness" (Andrews & Svalberg, 2017). Recent interpretations of the latter notion in particular have highlighted the fact that language teachers and learners alike are fundamentally positioned as investigators who analytically engage with language to discover linguistic phenomena rather than simply memorize fixed rules (Andrews & Svalberg, 2017). Teacher language awareness is not a static construct but is constantly evolving insofar as teachers use their capacities for analysing language to enhance their own awareness and also encourage analytical engagement amongst learners. This underpins the teacher's capacity to play the roles of language user, language analyst, and language teacher (Svalberg 2007). Such a view resonates strongly with views of the teacher and learner and the investigative stance that is central within intercultural language teaching (e.g. Liddicoat & Scarino 2013). However, the literature on teacher language awareness still operates within a rather narrow ontology of language in the sense that the focus tends to remain on the features of the linguistic system, and there is little discussion of the awareness of the cultural variability of linguistic practices as a constituent of teacher language awareness. Thus, looking at how language teachers interpret and reflect on their experiences of new linguistic forms and practices within the context of an extended stay in an L2 environment can help contribute to a more holistic view of teacher language awareness that integrates intercultural elements.

Set in an international higher education setting, this paper reports on a qualitative investigation into the ways four in-service English language teachers completing an MA TESOL degree experience diversity of the English language in their experiences of intercultural communication and how this leads them to develop insights for the teaching of English back in their respective home countries. The focus here is not on the impact of teachers' formal theoretical learning within the context of the MA TESOL programme, but rather on the development of insight on the basis of communicative experiences.

Two research questions are addressed:

1. What kinds of differences in terms of intercultural communication have teachers encountered during the stay in the UK?
2. Based on these experiences and insights, how may they deliver future English teaching within an intercultural orientation?

## **Methodology**

Based on the aim of tapping into teachers' sense-making regarding their own experiences and pedagogical ideas, this study adopted qualitative research methodology, as this allows for detailed attention to the "meanings, descriptions, values and characteristics of people and things" (Grbich, 2007, p. 26). Thus, rather than attempting to detect widely generalizable patterns, this study sought to understand participants' personal trajectories and associated perceptions. In so doing, we align with Coleman (2013) who emphasises the need to treat each individual as a whole person who processes experiences with personal agency.

The current study is fundamentally a narrative inquiry, which is understood by Murray (2009) as a collection of individuals' life stories "based on the premise that we understand or make sense of our lives through narrative" (p. 46). This means that respondents not only provide description of life stories, but also articulate personal beliefs and underlying assumptions, which helps researchers to derive educational insights (Murray, 2009). In other words, what lies at the heart is not only what has happened, but also reasons why happenings and experiences are described and evaluated in a certain way.

## **Setting and Participants**

Participants in this study were in-service language teachers completing MA degrees at an HE institution in the UK. It needs to be made clear at this point that all participants were known to the first author, who was enrolled as a student in the MA TESOL programme. Three participants were studying for an MA in TESOL and one participant was studying for an MA in Drama and English Language Teaching (DELT). At the time of data collection, participants had been living in the UK for around 9 months, which represents the most intense and most prolonged immersion in a different academic and cultural environment participants had ever had. With different nationalities and linguistic and cultural backgrounds, all participants were advanced English users. Participants provided full consent to participate in the study based on ethical guidelines and approval from the institution. Participant profiles are below.

**Amie** A 23-year-old Taiwanese female whose first language is Taiwanese Mandarin. Amie had 3-years part-time teaching experience as a lecturer and private English tutor in Taiwan. Before

arriving in the UK, she had participated in a 6-month exchange program in Hungary and a summer school project in Russia. She lived in on-campus accommodation where 8 international students shared a flat. She planned to teach in a private English language institution in Taiwan.

**Kipling** A 29-year-old Uzbek female whose first languages are Uzbek and Russian. She had 10 years of experience teaching students aged 15 to 28. Her previous international placements included a one-week teacher training program in the UK. She lived in on-campus accommodation where 8 international students shared a flat. Close to the time of this research, she obtained a position as the head of languages in a police training department in a university in Uzbekistan.

**Jisoo** A 35-year-old Korean female whose first language is Korean. She had 8-years teaching experience in a high school in South Korea. She had joined two international exchange projects: first in a university in England over a year, second in a university in the US for a semester. She lived in on-campus accommodation composed of 8 international students. She planned to continue teaching in her high school.

**Wen** A 26-year-old Chinese female whose first language is Mandarin. She had 5 years of teaching experience in a cram school in China. She had previously attended a 2-month teacher training program at an American university and accompanied her students for a one-month study tour in the US. She shared an off-campus house with three Chinese students. At the time of this research, she was considering her future work options.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data were gathered through two rounds of individual semi-structured interviews (45 minutes each) and one focus group interview (1.5 hours). This combination was considered conducive to eliciting in-depth perspectives in an iterative fashion by offering multiple opportunities for interpretation of experience and construction of narrative around experience (Dörnyei, 2007). Central to the design of this research was the consideration that it could be challenging for participants to spontaneously recall and reflect on salient experiences of intercultural communication (Gibson & Zhu, 2016). It was therefore decided to collect data at fortnightly intervals. Questions focused on participant's experience of daily life in the UK, cultural differences they perceived between the UK and their home countries, and potential shifts in their own perceptions on communication and the teaching of English. Throughout the three rounds, the same question protocol was applied to gather in-depth and more

elaborated accounts. This design allowed sufficient time and attention for the interviewees to reflect on past experiences and pedagogical implications, which may not have emerged in one single interview. Furthermore, it was acknowledged that participants' interpretations can shift as they encounter new experiences, which has the potential to bring further insights (Murray, 2009). The decision was made to employ visual prompts in the form of hand cards which depicted different domains of life and communication, such as greetings, politeness, friendships, leisure and customer service, as these can help participants retrospectively examine personal experiences (Dörnyei, 2007). Nevertheless, to avoid overly engineering interviews, these prompts were only used if interviewees had a hard time retrieving personal stories.

In between each round of interviews, data were transcribed manually in order to allow familiarity with the data and to help prepare for follow-up discussion in subsequent interviews. Data were analyzed in accordance with principles of inductive thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a method in which themes are identified, interpreted, and reported in a flexible yet systematic fashion. It resembles the fundamental process in qualitative analysis in terms of developing interpretative labels and connecting strands together. We followed a process in which transcripts were read through several times and initial thoughts were jotted down in the margin. Codes were initially developed by the first author and then cross-checked with the second author. Thus, codes went through a process of consolidation after each round of data collection. Following the completion of coding for the final focus groups, the authors referenced the codes against the codes from the previous rounds and then began identifying themes through which to discuss the data.

## **Analysis**

In this section, we present two main themes that emerged from analysis of the data. While both themes relate to shifts in learners' perceptions towards language use, the first theme is related to awareness of diversity within the English language that emerged based on participants' experiences, while the second theme relates to perceived cultural differences in linguistic practices. In the Extracts, 'R' represents the researcher.

### **Developing awareness of diversity within the English language**

The first theme which emerged in the data relates to shifts in participants' awareness and appreciation of diversity within the English language within and beyond particular named varieties of English (Baker, 2016). Whereas participants initially associated English spoken in the UK with the reified conception of "British English" or "Standard English" which is prevalent in ELT contexts, participants became gradually aware that the English being spoken around them was highly varied in terms of phonological,

structural, and pragmatic features according to features of sociocultural context, such as region, age, and ethnic background. The observation that even “native speakers” are diverse in their language usage appeared to lead participants to problematise the notion of “native speaker” and to question their own assumptions about notions of “Standard English” in language education. In the extracts in this section, participants show how they considered the significance of their emerging awareness of diversity for their own English usage and their pedagogical stance for future teaching practices.

### **Extract 1 (Group interview)**

- 1 R: I’m curious because all of you- uh all of you care about various accents and pronunciation of Englishes in the world, is it because you have some difficulties or some...new surprising findings about communication here, in the UK?
- 2 J: Even British says they have to understand what people says, they can’t understand the other accent if the one comes from North, and the one comes from South, they need to find out few hours of listening, then, when they get accustomed to their accent or their intonation. Yeah, even they say, so, how about us? =
- 3 W: =Yeah that’s normal, even in different country, I guess maybe in your country maybe different part.
- 4 J: yeah different region, or different country. Well, we can understand basically some things, but, yeah...
- 5 K: So, and when I came here, yeah, I had a lot of difficulties like to understand British English=
- 6 J: =At first, probably probably! Yeah?
- 7 K: Yeah. Because I got used to American English all the time, [and that was very shocking, I mean, not within the university, but outside, especially=
- 8 J: [me too.
- 9 J: =local people, among the local people.
- 10 K: Especially the young ones.
- 11 J: Oh yeah ((laugh)). They use lots of slang, and they do not care about the lan-, um us, who speak English as a second language.

Upon being prompted to consider their experiences of the English language, participants had reported observing much diversity in phonological features of English used around them. Jisoo in particular reports observing diversity in accent amongst people from different parts of the UK, noting that adjusting to unfamiliar accents can require time and communicative work even on the part of speakers from the same country. This, thus, challenges the perception of “British English” as a unitary entity and of “native speakers” being able to effortlessly communicate with others in spite of phonological differences. In the bottom part of Extract 1, Kipling describes her struggle with British English produced by the young generation outside the university, which Jisoo suggests might be due to the abundant use of slang and unmodified language. Here, he takes up the stance that use of slang is inconsiderate to speakers of other languages, the implication being the speakers should make efforts to accommodate to each other more.

In the extract below, attention gradually shifts from participants’ experiences to their pedagogical stances. Wen builds on her awareness of phonological diversity to problematize the idealized image of native speakers within English language learning and the role of native speakerism, considering how such an ideology might be challenged through teaching practices.

### **Extract 2 (Wen)**

- 1 R: So are there any aspects you would like to stress more?
- 2 W: Sometimes, maybe I can take pronunciation as an example, sometimes I think oh for us we’re learning linguistics, but I think oh pronunciation is important, but for me it’s important but it’s not that important sometimes, especially for my students, maybe their pronunciation is not that really good but I need to encourage them to speak it out sometimes. Even maybe their pronunciation is not very perfect but I think oh it’s really important I will tell them but I think, uh, there’s one saying that- which is, most, I mean, who will laugh at your pronunciation? Most of the time it’s Chinese people. Yeah but for the Western country’s person, they will care more about your content, your, I mean your thinking but not your pronunciation as long as they can understand what you are saying. So I think, um yeah pronunciation is important but is not that important.
- 3 R: As long as you can communicate and express your meaning-
- 4 W: Yeah so, but that doesn’t mean I won’t you know, pay more attention to their pronunciation but this is my belief now.
- 5 R: So is it the reason why you said you want them to mimic the pronunciation of the native speakers.

6 W: Yeah, yeah, but they don't need to be, uh behave have like a perfect native speaker, because everybody even like we- like us, we cannot do like that.

In the beginning, Wen explains her belief in the significance of pronunciation but emphasizes that it is not of utmost importance. She then constructs an explanation for this belief -- whereas Chinese people tend to mock one's pronunciation, Westerners focus on the content and communicative function of the conversation. Two interesting points can be observed here. First, the separation of "Chinese people" and "Western countries' person" represents a framing of this particular phenomenon with a perceived East-West dichotomy. Practices within China are seen in terms of national culture, which presents an essentialist view of culture classified on the simple basis of geographical boundaries. (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Norms that are contrary to those of China, on the other hand, are mapped onto the West as a whole. Second, the fact that Chinese speakers of English view "non-standard" accent as a deficiency in English reveals an embedded native speakerism which elevates native speakers as the standard (*who will laugh at your pronunciation? Most of the time it's Chinese people*). By placing native speakers at a superior rank, learners in China create discrimination against themselves, depriving themselves of the right to produce spoken English with their own accents (Pinner, 2016). Aware of the illusion of modelling and achieving native-speaker competence, Wen promotes moving away from native-speaker norms in English learning. Wen reports attaining this during her current residence approach, which exposed her to interaction with "Western country's person" who value the content of the conversation more than pronunciation. Whilst this is clearly an oversimplified category, it is nevertheless currently functioning as a categorical anchor that helps her articulate her perception of contrastive attitudes to linguistic diversity and the ideology of native speakerism (McConachy, 2018).

Extract 3 shows Kipling mainly exploring pedagogical possibilities for challenging Uzbek learners' assumptions about the value of different varieties of English

### **Extract 3 (Group interview)**

1 K: You know like... We've got very, you know, strict like prejudice that I can even claim that, you know, the only best English is let's say British English or the best English is American English, and only native speakers can develop that expertise, and no one else can. Yeah so this kind of you know...

2 J: perceptions you want to break up ((waving her fist)) that all.

- 3 K: Ah I'd say that was I guess my always dream ((laugh)), I always break some rules. So, and that's why I just want to change somehow their thinking, like about that... for example, as I told you, I can show them through the corpora because they have natural English. And, so, like, of course there are some mistakes in the..
- 4 J: authentic text.
- 5 K: Yeah! And but I mean, I would like to show the natural language to them, using the corpora so they won't be focu- you know, uh in my country, the huge emphasis is placed on the accuracy, so that English should be grammatically correct. And that's why our kids like suffer you know, they suffer because they want to speak but they're afraid of making mistakes.
- 6 A: The same ((laugh)).
- 7 K: They want to speak, but they're really kind of ashamed of talking, because they may make some kind of mistake, and everyone is going to laugh.

According to Kipling, three issues are attached to common attitudes toward English education: what accounts for the linguistic model, who speaks the best English, and what should be prioritized when it comes to English proficiency. She views American English and British English as enjoying a more prestigious status within Uzbek people's mindset. Further, as it is also believed that only native speakers of English can attain English mastery, native-speaker norms are perceived as the only acceptable language benchmark. Additionally, the education system in Uzbekistan places emphasis on structural rules in terms of English accuracy. These distorted views of native speakers' ownership of English result in learners' lack of confidence in spoken performance, since they are conscious of not possessing the perceived attributes of the native speaker.

One pedagogical response to this problem suggested by Kipling is the use of corpora data to challenge students' perspectives on the fixity of language. Kipling's belief in presenting examples in corpora is in line with the common belief that corpora for language learning are a descriptive account of how language is authentically used, which can be messy (Pinner, 2016). By pointing out that no language use can be flawless, she aims to challenge prescriptive notions associated with named varieties of English and therefore empower her own learners. In the following data extract, participants advocate introducing the concept of world Englishes to move beyond native-speakerism in the English education system.

#### **Extract 4 (Group interview)**

- 1 K: It's really hard. I think it's better way to introduce like the, world Englishes that exist in this world.
- 2 J: Yeah they should- yeah I agree! The students should know that there are not only one English, there are hundreds of different types English on Earth. So, even though they have to be educated in standard English, but...they should know that there are different types of English, like how the Indian says English, or how the Singaporean- Singaporean says English, or that kind of differences. They should acknowledge that stuff as well.
- 3 A: Yeah and also I'm not sure in your countries, but most of English learners in Taiwan, they believe in pure accent or pure English, so actually they only want to learn British or American accent or culture only in the English lesson, so I think it's- it's our responsibility to introduce different Englishes in different country.
- 4 J: Yeah you are right. World Englishes.
- 5 K: Yeah! Like, same about some circles of Englishes that kind. Circles, of English we have like-
- 6 R: The outer circle, the...
- 7 J: [[The outer circle.
- 8 K: [[Yeah. They will have some background knowledge, not like restricted knowledge of only 2 types of English. Because they do understand that there are only 2 types of English, what about New Zealand's English, and Australian English and other excellent accent.
- 9 J: Canadian English, and even Korean English we make a Konglish! Kind of stuff. Yeah.

Following the previous discussion, the participants continue to explore ways of introducing learners to diversity within the English language, this time adopting a pluricentric perspective that emphasises a number of distinct varieties of English (Kachru 1985). Significantly, participants agree that teachers play an essential role in raising students' awareness of a variety of Englishes despite some constraints in their teaching contexts, such as the inevitable adoption of "standard language" in the national curriculum and students' preference over American or British English. Kipling suggests the introduction of Kachru's (1985) Three-Circle model in which three concentric circles illustrate "the types of spread, the patterns of acquisition and the functional domains in which English is used across cultures and languages" (p. 12). By introducing world Englishes, Kipling not only desires to present the reality of universal English use but also to validate varieties in the Outer Circle and Expanding Circle.

## **Interpreting and negotiating culturally situated linguistic practices**

The data revealed that participants had become aware of differences in linguistic practices which are consequential for interpersonal relations and which participants themselves actively interpreted and reflected on in order to position themselves as individuals. Participants reported their experiences of cultural differences and their attempts to mediate for self (Liddicoat, 2014) by reflecting on what they have experienced, constructing comparisons with previous experiences and perceptions of cultural norms. Greeting practices surfaced as particularly salient in participants' accounts. Within language education, greeting practices are often regarded as relatively easy to learn due to their structural simplicity, and are indeed the staple of most beginner language textbooks. However, from an intercultural perspective, greetings can present a challenge to individuals in that greeting practices across languages can carry a range of symbolic and affective associations that may differ from the individuals' L1 (McConachy & Liddicoat, 2016). In fact, research shows that coming to use greetings in a context appropriate way to build interpersonal relations can be a significant challenge in a new cultural context (Spencer-Oatey, 2018). Below, Amie reflects on an episode with her German friend in which leave-taking practices became salient.

### **Extract 5 (Amie)**

- 1 R: How about, for example communication, is there any misunderstanding that happened between you and your friends?
- 2 A: Yeah- Because one time, I just said goodbye to my German friend, and I just- ah after I saying goodbye I just left. And he said, "hey you didn't give me a hug, it's quite rude." So at that time I just realized that, oh my god, it's quite culture different.
- 3 R: Um, so first you felt very shocked, so did you just hug him, after he said this?
- 4 A: Yeah, I just giv- gave him a hug and explain like it's totally different from my culture, but I like, I will do it because this is your culture, but you should like, you have to understand my situation. So that he won't think I'm rude at all.
- 5 R: So you tried to explain your mindset to him?
- 6 A: Yeah yeah.
- 7 R: How about to other people to other of you friends?

8 A: yeah so from that time, if I notice that my friend is trying to hug me, I will just, hug them.  
((laugh)) But for example if I met people from China, or from... from the countries that don't have this, this culture I'll just.... Yes.

In her account, Amie's attempt to achieve leave-taking by saying "goodbye" and turning away triggers her friend's request for a hug. It is at this point that Amie becomes aware of the divergent expectations at play based on different cultural practices for leave-taking. On this occasion, although Amie chose to accommodate to her interlocutor's practices, she also decided to explain her normal cultural practices in order to respond to the (mock) accusation of rudeness and emphasise the need for mutual respect. For Amie, this turned out to be a critical episode in which she not only became more aware of different expectations for leave-taking but also more attuned to the potential for differences to give rise to interpersonal assessments and the need for her to negotiate communicative divergences (Haugh, 2013). In other words, exposure to diverse interactional behaviours within her interpersonal sphere have become an important reference for more agentively considering her own communicative repertoire. Importantly, this example shows that the experience of building interpersonal relations in the UK has brought about engagement with cultural practices that originate in contexts beyond the UK. Greeting practices were also an area of new insights for Wen, who comments in Extract 6 on her responses to being greeted by strangers, which was an unfamiliar practice for her.

#### **Extract 6 (Wen)**

1 W: I think every time when I uh, walk through- uh on the road, I think sometimes some- uh old people, some aging person? They just, smile at me, and say hello to me, even I don't know them! You know! So, I think, oh it's really NICE, because they're so, friendly. And, I think you'll feel better if you see strange person and they are so friendly to you, and you'll feel oh you'll be very comfortable with that, with that situation. I think oh it's much better than in mainland China. So, I think I like this atmosphere.

2 R: Yeah! The way they greet strangers for someone even they don't know.

3 W: Yeah! Yeah! Even maybe not just, um uh not on the road, or even sometimes in the, uh like in the supermarket, or in the, bank? Or some place.

4 R: Ok, I'll leave it to the next question. So for the greeting um road part, will you do that to others now?

5 W: Uh now?

6 R: Yeah?

7 W: Sometimes, you know, when I pass- pass uh oh I mean, when I, uh pass through the person, I think, oh, if we have the eye contact that I will smile, even though maybe they, sometimes they don't smile, you know, but if we have the eye contact, I will smile. But when I go back to China, it's really weird if you do things like that. So I think this is the culture difference.

Wen reported an initial experience of surprise at strangers on the road greeting her with a smile, which she first interpreted as evidence of the inherent friendliness of local people. A contrast with China is made, with local greeting practices being evaluated more positively. These perceptions then create a space in which Wen is willing to try out such behaviours for herself. Similar to Amie, Wen takes contextual variations into consideration to appropriately respond to greeting practices which are not identical to those of her hometown. The context is essential to her, enabling her to learn globally and act locally. She will not choose to greet strangers in China as she does in the UK since it is perceived as "weird" by her. In this sense, she currently perceives the appropriateness of greetings to be bound by the context within which they are likely to be interpreted as meaningful by others.

Participants also revealed that the experience of difference politeness practices was a particularly salient trigger for reflecting on the cultural value of respect and how it is variably enacted in interpersonal relationships across cultures. This consideration became a resource for participants to themselves consider how to effectively mediate between their existing politeness repertoire and the practices they observed in the UK.

#### **Extract 7 (Amie)**

1 A: Oh politeness. I'd say even between teacher, professors and students. Like, no matter in the classroom or after classroom, I think in the UK, or from my experience in Budapest, I think, hmm, teacher and students are quite mutual respectiveness. I can see then, but in Taiwan, as a student, I need to be really respectful to, to, our professors. Even I need to bring some gifts if I want to give some request, or yeah request for some help.

2 R: What are some ways of being respectful to professors. So, besides behavior, is there any kind of linguistic dimension, for you to show respect?

3 A: For example, when I call them, I can't call their first name. I should say Dr. and plus their surname.

4 R: Um that's the title.

5 A: Yeah, like the title is quite important.

6 R: In Taiwan?

7 A: Um, but here I think in like in email, I always say dear blah blah blah, and just with their first name, and they don't care about this.

8 R: Do you feel comfortable like, calling them by their first name?

9 A: Actually, at first I can't get used to it because I felt like OH MY GOD I'm so rude!! I'm so impolite!! Yeah but after realized that this is their culture, and if I put my culture to-on them, they feel uncomfortable actually ((laugh)).

Amie's experiences in the UK and a previous international placement have raised questions for her concerning the enactment of politeness across languages and cultures. She perceives that hierarchical relations between teachers and students in Taiwan tend to be marked in a way that expresses distance, and thus experiences surprise at being asked by professors in her MA TESOL programme to refer to them on a first-name only basis. As Amie's assumption is that the linguistic embodiment of respect is largely associated with referring to teachers with title + surname, this challenges her notion of "respect" and puts her in a position where she becomes conscious of the gap between L1-related assumptions and the adaptive demands of her new cultural environment (Spencer-Oatey, 2018). When she gradually moves away from her linguistic and cultural starting points, the first-name basis is no longer considered "rude". Contrarily, she demonstrates empathy for others from a different cultural background, adopting new patterns to avoid imposing her own beliefs on others. This shows evidence of Amie's awareness of the cultural meanings attributed to pragmatic forms from a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspective, and this awareness serves as a resource for her to consider how to strategically position herself (McConachy, 2018).

From these various experiences, one of the main pedagogical insights derived by participants is the importance of promoting attributes such as curiosity, open-mindedness, respect and tolerance towards cultural diversity. In the extract below, Jisoo talks about what open-mindedness means to her and how she plans to develop students' openness to multiple cultures.

#### **Extract 8 (Jisoo)**

1 J: Open-minded to various culture, you need to accept, or you can understand, you should understand what it is or, at least try to understand. Um... be open-minded even if it has different value that you believe, or different belief. Um just acknowledge as itself, show some respect on it. You don't have to give up your own value, but just, yeah acknowledge as itself, even if sometimes it's against your personal belief, just, ok...

- 2 R: Then I'm curious, because open-mindedness is some abstract attitude, then have you thought about how you want to teach this open-mindedness to your students. How to help them develop this kind of ability.
- 3 J: Um... because culture is one of the aspect that comes from generation to generation. And it's relat- I believe it's related with their historical backgrounds, and their geographical situation, environment as well. So, it should be understood from their perspectives as well. Even if it's not the same as ours. So, for example, the way that you hold your bowl today, um, you said it's your culture to hold up your bowl when you have your meal, but in Korea we do not have that etiquette. It's thought to be rude, or impolite, to hold up your bowl on the table. That's one of the reason that, people think the way you hold up the bowl is the way that peasants or just some poor people used to do that. So that's one of the historical background that people believed, so that is reflected on the way we have our meal. And we hardly put chopsticks and spoons together, on hand at the same time because it look a bit weird. So...
- 4 R: So you mean that understanding culture means understanding the context as well.
- 5 J: Yes, context is important as well, because we need to find out why that behavior or why that certain um thing happened, is reflected from the way back- from their historical, or cultural or environmental contexts.
- 6 R: Then how are you going to show that to your students? How do you want them to develop this kind of awareness?
- 7 J: Because, I will probably introduce the cultural background as well, like a historical background, or some of the um cultural background....As you talked about the envelope today, yeah, we, well, we just say, we put the money into the white envelope, but you said it's for the funeral. So white, color white could be related to funeral stuff in your country. But the color white actually means some pure, or purity, or some clean, or all that flawlessness in Korean culture. So, yeah, we need to understand that historical or cultural background as well.

For Jisoo, being open-minded is to have understanding and acceptance towards cultural differences, even though they may conflict with one's beliefs. To help students develop open-mindedness, Jisoo proposes equipping them with holistic background information for various cultural aspects, such as using a historical perspective to highlight the relativity of culture due to its evolution in particular circumstances across time and space. The implication is that understanding that culture evolves in accordance with living conditions and historical forces is a way of coming to see culture in context and

to see that there are reasons for cultural behaviours even if they might seem strange from the outside (Kramersch, 1993).

In Extracts 9 and 10, participant comments also foreground the important role of the teacher in making their own experiences available to students as a resource for considering the nature of cultural differences and how to engage with them, both behaviourally and attitudinally.

#### **Extract 9 (Kipling)**

1 K: ANYWAY, because you will face [difference], you may not know all of them, because it's totally different culture. For example, even though I know some of the rules, anyway I have seen other things that were really, kind of... unexpected things! So, anyway, you will learn something....So you know your own culture, and if you have been as a teacher you've been abroad you've seen these cultures you can share some kind of, um let's say experiences about these cultures. I mean, so... if I want to teach my students about the cultural differences, I cannot teach the whole world's cultures. It's impossible.

Kipling's comment illustrates the important insight that intercultural development is a life-long pursuit with no endpoint because of the infinite nature of cultural diversity. She translates this insight into a pedagogical stance as a teacher in the sense that she sees an important role for direct sharing of knowledge and insights from teachers' own experiences rather than attempting to cover all culture-related topics. In this vision, a teacher's role is to be a resource for students to draw on to support learning. This notion was also supported by Wen and Amie, who comment below:

#### **Extract 10 (Wen and Amie)**

1 W: First of all I think because I have this personal experience, and for the students, I think, compared with the online videos, it's even more persuasive, because you're their teachers and they believe in you, and they think maybe they're more interested in you, not the people in videos, so I think it's also a good teaching resource for the- for you.

2 A: Actually I feel like I learn a lot after I came here, um, yeah, of course, my area- the area of my learning, and also my social life, and anything... a lot, I learn a lot from these experiences.... So one of main the reasons that I want to share my stories or my experiences is because I want to like push them, or encourage them to stay out of the comfort zone to come here. Even they don't have enough money, but probably come here for traveling for one month and that's enough. They can learn something I guess.

For Wen, teacher-student rapport has the potential to make teachers' accounts of their own experiences particularly powerful from a pedagogical perspective. The personal connection between teacher and student amplifies the affective resonance of teachers' experiences and helps generate interest and motivation. For Amie, her own experience of personal change has led to the desire to push her students out of their comfort zone and engage in experiential learning in a potentially radically different environment, such as through overseas study or traveling. Whilst each participant here emphasises slightly different elements, they converge in the sense that they foreground the role of the teacher as someone who actively considers the relevance of their own experiences for student learning, with appreciation of the affective power of these experiences when used as a pedagogical tool (Johnson & Golombek, 2016).

### **Discussion and implications**

It is clear from the analysis above that teachers' communicative experiences during their time in the UK have helped them become more aware of the linguistic and cultural diversity of the English language, challenge their preconceptions concerning normative language use, and begin to consider concrete ways that they might translate their insights into pedagogical practices. From their experiences in a new cultural environment, teachers have developed language awareness which encompasses appreciation for diversity – particularly at the level of phonology, lexis and pragmatics – and have developed a pedagogical stance informed by a view of the English language as inherently diverse within and across different varieties. Teachers' communicative experiences have also provided fertile ground for developing awareness of the culturally variable nature of everyday interactional practices central to the management of interpersonal relations, particularly greeting and leave-taking practices, and issues of politeness in situations marked by power distance (Spencer-Oatey, 2018). Teachers enhanced their awareness of the variability of linguistic practices and have considered their own ways of interpreting experiences and personalised behavioural responses (Liddicoat, 2014). In other words, reflection on experience has helped teachers see language use as a more situated phenomenon that is interpreted through individual's own cultural frames of reference.

This development of insight into the diversity of the English language has been accompanied by a critical questioning of ideologies such as native speakerism, which exert considerable influence on the value attributed to particular varieties of English within English language education (Holliday, 2005). Ironically, this has been informed by participants' perception that "Westerners" care much less about notions of "standard English" than teachers and learners in China and Uzbekistan, though the construct of "Western" is not critically reflected upon. The teachers in this study have largely articulated the importance of helping their own learners develop awareness of different varieties of

English, based on the need to challenge linguistic prejudice. In this sense, teachers have translated their new insights into diversity into a critical pedagogical stance characterised by the desire to challenge excessively normative conceptions of language in language education from within their own classrooms (Baker, 2020). Thus, teachers' language awareness extends beyond awareness of linguistic forms and practices to encompass critical questioning of ideologies that shape perceptions towards language (Taylor et al., 2018).

Teachers have also formulated a clear stance towards engagement with cultural diversity, emphasising the importance of remaining open-minded towards new behaviours and actively considering the extent to which one wishes to approximate the behaviours of others. This key insight was drawn from teachers' own experiences of negotiating cultural differences that surfaced in communication and considering how to expand their own communicative repertoire in a comfortable way (McConachy & Liddicoat, 2016). Affectively, participants have come to regard open-mindedness as a central attitudinal attribute for coping with differences, which is parallel to researchers' findings in the literature (e.g. Cushner, 2007; Walters et al., 2009). Importantly, teachers have developed the pedagogical convictions that they would like to develop the same skills and qualities in their own learners.

One implication of this study is that there is much potential for teacher training programmes to harness the value of teachers' own communicative experiences as a resource for enhancing teachers' awareness of their own assumptions about linguistic and cultural diversity and how this informs (or doesn't inform) teaching practices. We suggest that language teacher training invest more in the development of teachers' own interpretive and reflective capacities, as well as their abilities to talk about the link between own perspectives and own practices, linking everyday understandings of (communicative) experience with professional notions of teaching. These are increasingly important professional capacities for language teachers, yet the ability to more deeply interpret experiences and reflect on the underpinnings of one's own pedagogical stance does not necessarily develop automatically or easily (Johnson & Golombek, 2016). We suggest that teachers could be assisted to develop these abilities through activities such as reflective journals, individual mentoring, group discussions, or project work. Individual work facilitates personalised understandings based on teachers' own life experiences and unique teaching contexts, while collective work helps teachers generate collective intelligence and reshape teaching philosophies (Cranton & Crusetta, 2004). Although it might be unreasonable to expect immediate generation of new insights and immediate implementation of new practices, the capacity for ongoing reflection on the nature of language and

meaning making increases the likelihood of insights developing over time, exerting long-lasting influence in teachers' professional lives (Walters et al., 2009).

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, we have argued for the importance of tapping into teachers' own intercultural experiences as a way of enhancing teachers' capacities for personal and professional development. The empirical study we have reported on in this paper has shown that extended periods of residence in a country where the L2 is spoken provide particular opportunities for teachers to broaden their perspectives on the diversity of language and the culturally contexted ways it is used to achieve interpersonal and pedagogical ends. This, then, helps reshape teachers' pedagogical knowledge base and their own stance towards the teaching of English as a global language. In this way, the line between personal development and professional development as a language teacher is blurred (Rodriguez, 2011). Embracing linguistic and cultural diversity becomes part of a personal stance and teaching philosophy that enables teachers to formulate future teaching practices. We believe that it would be highly meaningful for future research to trace the impact of experiences abroad on actual teaching practices, honing in on the ways teachers make use of their intercultural experiences in a classroom context and how they attempt to socialize their own learners into a view of the English that recognizes diversity as natural and valuable.

## **List of references**

Andrews, S., & Svalberg, A. M. L. (2017). Teacher Language Awareness. In J. Cenoz, D. Gorter & S. May (Eds.), *Language Awareness and Multilingualism, Encyclopedia of Language and Education* (pp. 219-231). (3rd ed.). Springer.

Baker, W. (2016). English as an academic lingua franca and intercultural awareness: Student mobility in the transcultural university, *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 16(3), 437-451.

Baker, W. (2020). English as a lingua franca and transcultural communication: Rethinking competences and pedagogy for ELT. In C.J. Hall & R. Wicaksono (Eds.), *Ontologies of English: Conceptualising the Language for Learning, Teaching, and Assessment* (pp. 253-271). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.

- Brindley, R., Quinn, M., & Lou Morton, M. (2009). Consonance and dissonance in a study abroad program as a catalyst for professional development of pre-service teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25(3), 525-532.
- Coleman, J. A. (2013). Researching whole people and whole lives. In C. Kinginger (Ed.), *Social and Cultural Aspects of Language Learning in Study Abroad* (pp. 17-44). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Cranton, P., & Crusetta, E. (2004). Developing authenticity as a transformative process. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 2, 276–293.
- Cushner, K. (2007). The role of experience in the making of internationally-minded teachers. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 34(1), 27-39.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodologies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Díaz, A. R. (2013). *Developing Critical Languaculture Pedagogies in Higher Education: Theory and Practice*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Gibson, B. & Zhu, H. (2016). Interviews. In H. Zhu (Ed.), *Research Methods in Intercultural Communication: A Practical Guide* (181-195). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Göbel, K., & Helmke, A. (2010). Intercultural learning in English as foreign language instruction: The importance of teachers' intercultural experience and the usefulness of precise instructional directives. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(8), 1571-1582.
- Haugh, M. (2013). Impoliteness, social practice and the participation order. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 58, 52-72.
- He, Y., Lundgren, K., & Pynes, P. (2017). Impact of short-term study abroad program: Inservice teachers' development of intercultural competence and pedagogical beliefs, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 66, 147-157.
- Holliday, A. (2005). *The Struggle to Teach English as an International Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Johnson, K.E. & Golombek, P.R. (2016). *Mindful L2 Teacher Education: A Sociocultural Perspective on Cultivating Teachers' Professional Development*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Kachru, B. B. (1985). Standards, codification and sociolinguistic realism: The English language in the outer circle. In R. Quirk & H. G. Widdowson (Eds.), *English in the World: Teaching and Learning the Language and Literatures* (pp. 11-30). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Kramersch, C. (1993). *Context and Culture in Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kramersch, C. (2020). Translating experience in language teaching research and practice. *Applied Linguistics*, 41 (1), 30-51.
- Kramersch, C. & Zhang, L. (2018). *The Multilingual Instructor*. Oxford University Press.
- Kohler, M. (2020). *Developing Intercultural Language Learning*. Palgrave.
- Liddicoat, A. J. (2014). Pragmatics and intercultural mediation in intercultural language learning. *Intercultural Pragmatics*, 11(2), 259-277.
- Liddicoat, A. J., & Scarino, A. (2013). *Intercultural Language Teaching and Learning*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Marx, H., & Moss, D. M. (2011). Please mind the culture gap: Intercultural development during a teacher education study abroad program. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 62(1), 35-47.
- McConachy, T. (2013). Exploring the meta-pragmatic realm in English language teaching. *Language Awareness*, 22 (2), 100-110.
- McConachy, T. (2018). *Developing Intercultural Perspectives on Language Use in Foreign Language Learning*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- McConachy, T. & Liddicoat, A. J. (2016). Meta-pragmatic awareness and intercultural competence: The role of reflection and interpretation in intercultural mediation. In F. Dervin & Z. Gross (Eds.), *Intercultural competence in Education: Alternative Approaches for Today's Education* (pp. 13-25). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Murray, G. (2009). Narrative Inquiry. In J. Heighm and R. A. Croker (Eds.), *Qualitative Research in Applied Linguistics: A Practical Introduction* (pp. 45-65). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pinner, R. S. (2016). *Reconceptualising Authenticity for English as a Global Language*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters
- Rodriguez, E. (2011). What pre-service teachers bring home when they travel abroad: Rethinking teaching through a short international immersion experience. *Scholar-Practitioner Quarterly*, 5(3), 289-305.
- Scarino, A. (2014). Learning as reciprocal, interpretive meaning-making: A view from collaborative research into the professional learning of teachers of languages. *The Modern Language Journal*, 98 (1), 386-401.

Spencer-Oatey, H. (2018). Transformative learning for social integration: overcoming the challenge of greetings, *Intercultural Education*, 29(2), 301-315.

Svalberg, A. M. L. (2007). Language awareness and language learning. *Language Teaching*, 40, 287-308.

Taylor, S.K., Despaigne, C. & Faez, F. (2018). Critical language awareness. In J.I. Lontas (Ed.), *The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching*. Wiley.

Walters, L., Garii, B., & Walters, T. (2009). Learning globally, teaching locally: incorporating international exchange and intercultural learning into pre-service teacher training. *Intercultural Education*, 20(1), 151-58.