**English as an academic lingua franca and intercultural awareness: student mobility in the transcultural university**

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**Abstract**

The increasingly international orientation of many higher education institutes and the growing role of English as an academic lingua franca have far reaching implications for how we conceptualise universities and student mobility. In this paper it is argued that the complexity and diversity of languages, communities and cultures present in many HE institutes mean we can no longer assume a connection between the language of instruction, a local host community and a national culture and language. This is particularly the case in English medium instruction programmes outside of Anglophones settings but also in international universities in Anglophone settings, both of which will be the focus of this paper. The term transcultural university is adopted to reflect this complexity and to move beyond nation based conceptions of universities. In educating students for mobility in such environments it is suggested that pedagogy needs to go beyond essentialist language, culture and nation correlations. Intercultural awareness is proposed as a crucial element in preparing students to negotiate the diversity and fluidity of communicative practices in transcultural universities in which mobile students need equally mobile communicative resources.

การปรับตัวเข้าสู่นานาชาติทีเพิ่มขึ้นของสถาบันการศึกษาระดับอุดมศึกษาหลายสถาบันและบทบาทที่เติบโตขึ้นของภาษาอังกฤษเชิงวิชาการที่ใช้กันระหว่างคนต่างชาติต่างภาษามีความเกี่ยวข้องกันอย่างมากในการวางกรอบแนวความคิดเกี่ยวกับมหาวิทยาลัยนักศึกษาแลกเปลี่ยนและนักศึกษานานาชาติ(student mobility)งานวิจัยฉบับนี้นำเสนอประเด็นความซับซ้อนและความหลากหลายทางภาษาชุมชนและวัฒนธรรมในสถาบันอุดมศึกษาหลายแห่งที่แสดงให้เห็นว่าเราไม่สามารถคาดเดาความเชื่อมโยงระหว่างภาษาที่ใช้ในการสอนชุมชนภาษาท้องถิ่นและภาษาและวัฒนธรรมประจำชาติได้อีกต่อไปโดยเฉพาะกรณีการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นสื่อกลางในการสอนของประเทศที่ไม่ได้ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาหลักเพื่อการสื่อสารและมหาวิทยาลัยนานาชาติในประเทศที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาหลักเพื่อการสื่อสารซึ่งการศึกษาทั้งสองรูปแบบนี้เป็นจุดสำตัญในงานวิจัยฉบับนี้คำว่ามหาวิทยาลัยข้ามวัฒนธรรม(intercultural awareness)ได้นำมาใช้เพื่อสะท้อนให้เห็นถึงความซับซ้อนและแนวความคิดที่ไม่ยึดติดกับชนชาติของมหาวิทยาลัยต่างๆการให้การศึกษาในสภาพแวดล้อมที่มีการแลกเปลี่ยนนักศึกษาและนักศึกษานานาชาติดังกล่าวชี้ให้เห็นว่าการเรียนการสอนจำเป็นต้องไปไกลกว่าแนวความคิดดั้งเดิมเรื่องความสัมพันธ์ของภาษาวัฒนธรรมและชนชาติความตระหนักระหว่างวัฒนธรรมถือเป็นองค์ประกอบสำคัญในการเตรียมความพร้อมนักศึกษาสู่การเจรจาในสังคมที่มีความหลากหลายและความลื่นไหลของการสื่อสารในมหาวิทยาลัยแบบข้ามวัฒนธรรมที่นักศึกษาแลกเปลี่ยนและนักศึกษานานาชาติเหล่านี้จำเป็นต้องมีทรัพยากรด้านการสื่อสารแบบแลกเปลี่ยนเคลื่อนที่ด้วยเช่นกัน

**Keywords:** English as an academic lingua franca, intercultural awareness, student mobility, transcultural university, education, intercultural communication

**Introduction**

Student mobility both through exchanges and the presence of ‘international’ students has always been part of higher education. However, with the rapid expansion of the processes of internationalisation in recent years student mobility has come to occupy an increasingly prominent position in higher education debates. Alongside the academic benefits, one of the aims of student mobility has been to increase students’ intercultural awareness to better equip them for the increasingly interconnected, multicultural world they find themselves in after graduation (see for example Knight’s (2003) definition of internationalisation below). Yet, it has also been recognised that intercultural exchanges do not by themselves guarantee development in intercultural awareness. Appropriate support, evaluation and reflection are crucial to successful intercultural student exchanges (Byram and Feng, 2006). Traditionally though much of the preparation for student mobility has centred on the national languages and cultures of the host institution’s country (Jackson, 2012). While still of relevance, a focus solely on the national scale is unlikely to reflect the transnational, multilingual and multicultural environments that many students find themselves in. OECD statistics (2014) for student mobility reveal the increasingly international make-up of higher education institutions globally with over twice as many tertiary students enrolled outside their country of citizenship as a decade ago.

Therefore, to adequately prepare students for this diversity the international and transcultural nature of contemporary higher education needs to be incorporated into preparation and support. This entails going beyond more stable national cultural characterisations, groupings and identities in preparation courses and also focusing on the fluid, multiple and complex nature of cultural groupings and identities in such transcultural settings. This needs to be accompanied by recognition of the multilingual environment of many international universities where local languages exist alongside students’ first languages and increasingly English used a lingua franca (ELF)[[1]](#endnote-1). Indeed, the growth of ELF in academia and an expansion of English medium instruction (EMI) programmes have proceeded in parallel to the rise in student mobility and internationalisation (Jenkins, 2014). However, it is crucial that we recognise that this is not Anglophone English but English owned by all who use it in academia. Thus, education for student mobility in EMI should reflect the twin goals of awareness of the transcultural nature of internationally orientated universities and the use of English as an academic lingua franca alongside local languages (including Anglophone varieties of English). This paper will introduce the notion of the ‘transcultural university’ to capture the current diversity and complexity of higher education and explore the notion of intercultural awareness as a means of conceptualising the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to communicate successfully in such multilingual and multicultural settings. This will be followed by a discussion of the pedagogic implications of ELF and intercultural awareness for intercultural education as part of student mobility. The focus of this paper will be on higher education settings where English is used as the medium of instruction and in Anglophone international universities; however, given that multilingualism and multiculturalism are part of much contemporary higher education there are likely to be implications for other settings too.

**Internationalisation and transcultural universities**

As already noted in the introduction, universities have always been international in one way or another, with some of the earliest European institutions of learning recruiting students from other countries over 2,000 years ago (Jackson, 2012, p. 450). Nonetheless, the international dimension to higher education (henceforth HE) has gained significantly in pace over the past few decades and has become a central part of the landscape of HE discussions. This can be seen as a response to globalisation[[2]](#endnote-2) in which HE, to quote Knight’s well cited definition, incorporates “an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, function or delivery of post-secondary education” (2003, p. 3). However, how this ‘international, intercultural or global dimension’ is integrated in policy and practice in HE is widely variable and much debated. Clearly HE institutes are not homogeneous entities and so a range of responses to internationalisation are to be expected.

Foskett (2010) identifies five categories of universities in relation to their engagement with internationalisation. These are: ‘domestic universities’ primarily concerned with local and regional contexts; ‘imperialist universities’ which actively recruit international students but have done little to change the institution; ‘internationally aware universities’ which are adapting their organisation to be more international but as yet have not engaged extensively with overseas institutions or students; ‘internationally engaged universities’ with extensive links with overseas universities, international student recruitment and adaptation in the institution to meet the needs of a diverse international student and staff body; ‘internationally focused universities’ in which internationalisation has led to a deep transformation of the institution with strong internationalisation ‘at home’ and ‘abroad’ perspectives and practices (Foskett, 2010, p. 44-45). Each of these categories reflects a range of beliefs and practices concerning the economic, political, ideological and cultural role of HE (Maringe and Foskett, 2010).There are also differences between institutions’ perceptions and practices, with universities unlikely to openly identify with an ‘imperialist’ position, in which international students are not viewed as anything other than economic resources, even if practices suggest otherwise.

However internationalisation is framed in HE, student mobility, and to a lesser extent staff mobility, is central to the process (Byram and Dervin, 2008; Jenkins, 2014). According to OECD statistics, “in 2012, more than 4.5 million students were enrolled in tertiary education outside their country” (2014, p. 342). This is double the number of a decade ago and represents an annual rise of around 7%. However, this movement of international students is not even, with the majority of international students (82%) enrolled in G20 countries but coming from Asia (53%). Within this group of recipients of international students, Australia, Austria, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Switzerland and the United Kingdom have the highest proportion of international students at around 10% for undergraduate level and rising to 30% for postgraduate. In contrast to the large number of incoming students, countries in this group such as the UK only ‘send out’ approximately 1 student to every 13 received (OECD, 2014, p. 350). Of course just as there is a great deal of diversity in HE institutions so there is in the types and purposes of student mobility. These statistics include students on ‘study abroad’ programmes which are only part of an academic programme (e.g. ERASMUS in the EU), whole programme students, fee and non-fee paying students. The purposes of student mobility are equally varied including, content knowledge, language learning, intercultural experiences, academic networking and social and emotional development (Coleman, 2013). Furthermore, as well documented in the research, the outcomes of time spent abroad are highly variable and difficult to predict with students in seemingly similar situations often gaining very different experiences and knowledge (e.g. Byram and Feng, 2006).

As already indicated by the imbalance between the destinations and countries of origin of international students, student mobility needs to be approached critically, and is not necessarily an advantageous process for all. There is the impact on both local institutions and wider society of the movement of so many students away from regions such as Asia, referred to more commonly as the ‘brain drain’. There are also concerns about the exploitation of fee paying (frequently very high fees in countries such as the UK) international students who may be seen as a financial resource rather than an integral part of academic institutions. This is highlighted in Foskett’s identification of ‘imperialist universities’ (2010) but is also a concern in many of the other types of universities on his list. Furthermore, student mobility can be viewed as a form of elitism since it typically involves students and institutions which are already in a powerful and advantaged position and as such may represent a reinforcement of current power structures. Indeed, exchange programmes such as Fullbright are run with the specific goal of fostering the interests of the US and are viewed as a form of soft power. However, there are some indications of the dynamism of the situation with the percentage of international students in the US falling and Korea and the Russian Federation emerging as destinations with growing numbers (OECD, 2014).

Part of this increase in student mobility can be explained by the rising importance of English in academia and more generally with its current role as the dominant global lingua franca. OECD statistics indicate that 41% of the increase in international student enrolment over the last decade has been in Anglophone settings. Furthermore, there has been a rapid growth in English medium instruction programmes in non-Anglophone settings during the same period with over 25% of postgraduate programmes in OECD countries now offered in English (OECD, 2014). Again there are concerns about the implications such extensive use of English may have on HE. This includes furthering the already dominant position of many Anglophone universities and advantaging native speakers of English from these settings (Jenkins, 2014), promoting Anglophone varieties of English internationally and domain loss for other languages of academia (Phillipson, 2008).

What emerges from this brief overview of HE and the role of student mobility in it is the complexity of the current landscape of HE. Universities, although always international, are becoming increasingly multicultural and multilingual with very diverse student and staff bodies. This represents a challenge to the national orientation of universities over the last century and increases the need to adopt an international orientation; however institutions might chose to interpret that. Yet, the argument in this paper will be that, despite this obvious diversity, the implications of internationalisation for educating students for mobility has frequently been under conceptualised and inadequately explored in discussions and debates. Regardless of the clear challenges contemporary realities provide to viewing universities at the national scale, much of the thinking still focuses on the notion of the university as a national institution set within a national context with a correspondingly identifiable national language and culture.

Jenkins (2014), drawing on Foskett’s (2010) critique of HE institutions partial engagement with the processes of internationalisation, documents from a sociolinguistic perspective how non-Anglophone universities still impose Anglo-centric native speaker English language policies and practices in English medium instruction programmes (henceforth EMI) particularly through standardised language tests such as IELTS and TOEFL. Jenkins (2014) also details the failure of Anglophone institutions to recognise the linguistic practices of many of their international students who are not native speakers of English. This results in the marginalisation of such students with the inevitable negative impact on students’ perceptions of their education experience. Lumby and Foskett (2015) question the assumption that internationalisation automatically entails positive cultural change and are critical of simplistic ‘win –win’ scenarios, arguing that a more nuanced understanding of the range of cultural changes brought about by internationalisation is needed. Nonetheless, the national focus on both language and culture continues into much of the student mobility literature. For example, in Jackson’s (2012) overview of ‘education abroad’ the assumption is very much that students will gain knowledge and experience of the ‘local’ language and culture of the institution where local is equated with the national. Even when recognising the growing role of EMI programmes and the influence this may have on ‘local’ languages, the key issue is still “the quality and degree of contact with the host language and culture” (2012, p. 452). Likewise, Coleman (2013, p.31) in an important overview of study abroad literature, in which he is rightly critical of simplistic assumptions about student mobility and learning experiences, still places socialisation and acculturation into local social networks as the ultimate aim of study abroad experiences.

While it may be argued that we should expect local national languages and cultures to be predominant in study abroad, at least in the European sense where students spend time abroad specifically to learn a ‘local’ language and culture, this is only one aspect of student mobility and does not adequately address the diversity of contemporary HE. In contrast, a recent empirical study of Erasmus students in just such a study abroad setting in Hungary revealed a much more complex process (Kalocsai, 2014). Kalocsai’s research showed multilingual and multicultural groupings of students forming communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) with their own emergent cultural and linguistic practices through the use of English as a lingua franca (rather than native like English). Given the clearly intercultural nature of the students’ experiences and their development of a range of new communicative repertories, it would seem inappropriate to regard this as a somehow inferior experience to acculturation to ‘local’ norms. Furthermore, motivation studies have demonstrated an increasing orientation to ‘international communities’ as opposed to local ones in the motivations of language students, particular as regards English (e.g. Csizer and Kontra, 2012).

With these diverse student and staff bodies, multilingualism and multiculturalism are increasingly the norm especially in those institutions which are, or aim to be, internationally orientated. This entails viewing the national as just one scale of many in understanding HE. While international as a prefix to university goes some way to recognising this, ‘transcultural’ is perhaps the better prefix. International implies movement *between* nations and hence retains the idea of universities as nationally definable entities; whereas, the current state of HE is more fluid than this with students, staff and academic practices in general moving *through* and *across* different universities settings which are no longer confined by national boundaries. The transcultural university[[3]](#endnote-3) better captures this fluidity and dynamism as well as the range of cultural groupings students and staff may identify with. This has important consequences for how we conceive student mobility; students are no longer moving from one national setting to another in which they need to acculturate to the local culture. Rather students can be seen as moving through networks in international education settings with both shared academic practices and also local diversity. Nonetheless, it is crucial that an appropriate balance is struck between the needs of universities to adapt to international student bodies, rather than vice-versa, but also that local, although not necessarily national, strengths are retained. Such a perspective has many implications at a range of levels in HE in terms of management, policies, curriculum, pedagogy, administration and staffing. However, the focus of this paper will be on the implications of this for educating students for mobility in transcultural universities.

**Language, identity and community in the transcultural university**

In the previous section the increasing role of English in HE was recognised both through the number of students studying in Anglophone settings and the growth of EMI programmes globally. However, how English and other languages are conceptualised in this is far from straightforward. Language and in particular the role of English is frequently ignored or oversimplified in discussions of internationalisation and also student mobility[[4]](#endnote-4). While Coleman (2013) rightly cautions that student mobility as about much more than just language development, language is still a key part of the experience of internationalisation and to ignore it is to miss a crucial factor in providing a holistic account of internationalisation. As Jenkins (2014) highlights the failure of many HE institutions to adequately address the complexity of the linguistic landscape of international universities has resulted in much linguistic inequality, especially as regards English. At the same time though we need to avoid overly simplistic interpretations of the role of English in which it is viewed as a reified monolithic entity imposing Anglophone academic traditions on the rest of the world (e.g. Phillipson, 2008). While there are significant power issues related to the role of English that need to be taken seriously in any analysis of language in student mobility and internationalisation, to assume that English is ‘imposed’ on all who use it is to ignore the role of agency at both individual and institutional levels (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 49-50). As research on ELFA (English as an academic lingua franca) has demonstrated English is used in highly variable ways and adapted and integrated into local contexts in a manner that is anything but monolithic (e.g. Seidlhofer, 2011; Mauranen, 2012; Björkman, 2013).

Furthermore, English does not exist in isolation in transcultural universities but is typically part of a multilingual environment in which English exists alongside geographically local languages and a range of different first languages (L1s). Therefore we need to adopt flexible approaches to understanding the role of languages of the type outlined in notions such as plurilingualism, translanguaging and multilingual francas in which the boundaries between languages are not clearly defined (e.g. Canagarajah, 2013; Garcia and Wei, 2014; Jenkins, 2015)[[5]](#endnote-5). For example, on an EMI programme in Thailand a lecture can be given in English but side talk from students is in a range of different L1s; questions to the lecturer can be in a mixture of English and Thai; the university’s linguistic landscape is bilingual English and Thai; communication outside of the university is in Thai and social activities conducted in a mix of all these languages. This linguistic complexity and how it is managed by students needs to be accounted for in any attempt to characterise student mobility. Thus, while the focus of this paper is on the role of English, or rather ELFA, in student mobility, it is important to be clear that this does not exclude other languages and that English functions as part of a multilingual landscape.

Given the central role of language in the construction of identity similarly complex and fluid approaches need to be adopted in any examination of the development of identity through student mobility. The fluid, multiple and fragmentary nature of identity and its relationship to language is now well documented in applied linguistics and so will not be repeated here (e.g. Kramsch, 2009). In ELF research too identity has been a key issue of investigation (e.g. Jenkins, 2007). Although there were some early suggestions that ELF might somehow function as an identity neutral language (e.g. House, 2003), empirical research has shown that identity is as a relevant an issue through ELF as it is with any use of language. Indeed to suggest that there is such a thing as identity neutral communication is to misunderstand the nature of communication as a social practice. Identity is always present, although there may be times when it is not especially relevant, important or interesting to the participants or researchers. Baker (2009; 2011; 2015) showed how university students in Thailand made use of English to construct fluid and dynamic identities alongside more stable L1/C1 (first culture) identities and the importance of intercultural communication through ELF in this process. Kalocsai (2014) documented how for a group of Erasmus students in Hungary ELF became a key part of how they constructed their identities in emergent communities of practice among other Erasmus students. Student mobility literature has also recognised the significance of the relationship between language and identity and highlighted that without sufficient proficiency in the language students may not be able to construct and express the identity they wish (Kinginger, 2015). Writers such as Kinginger (2015) and Coleman (2013) emphasise the importance of looking at the range of identities students have available to them going beyond the national and foreign and including, gender, age and sexuality. However, these are still typically conceived of in relation to the students own L1 culture and the ‘host’ culture. More recognition and research is needed in student mobility that looks at identity construction where there are fluid and dynamic groupings, and hybrid and multiple identities, as is likely to be the case in transcultural universities.

Just as we should expect fluidity in identity construction for mobile students, so too should we expect the communities and cultures students identify with to be equally fluid. Students are likely to identify with a range of different communities simultaneously which may include: academic communities, particularly at post-graduate level; local social networks among other students which are likely to develop their own emergent cultural practices; connections with home cultures particularly through electronic communication; geographically local communities that surround the host institution; and ad hoc communities which are highly transient with equally transient negotiated and emergent communicative practices and cultural references. Again ELF research has demonstrated the role of English in forming and maintaining shared repertories of communicative and other social practices in the social groupings that emerge through student interactions (Baker, 2009; 2011; 2015; Kalocsai, 2014). As already noted in the previous section, there is a tendency in student mobility research to view communities and cultures in terms of students’ home culture and the host culture and to focus on how students negotiate the differences between them. However, viewing student mobility in such binary terms essentialises both the communities and identities students construct and represent. Students may identify with a range of local, national, and globally orientated communities. They may choose to identify with local ‘host’ communities but equally they may not. And neither should we assume that reluctance on the part of students to engage with local communities is a failure. An international student who comes to the UK to study a Masters in electronic engineering may well be motivated by gaining content knowledge from the programme and an international network of peers, but may have little interest in integrating in British culture during their relatively short stay. Furthermore, we need to be wary of assuming there is an identifiable local culture and community in transcultural universities and even more so of correlating that with a national culture. As OECD statistics (2014) show many universities teaching through English, particularly but not only in Anglophone settings, are superdiverse settings where nationalist ideologies of culture are unlikely to reflect the varied sociocultural networks that students experience[[6]](#endnote-6).

In sum, we have a picture of the transcultural university in which English is the dominant language of instruction with the power issues that this entails particularly in relation to the dominance of the academic norms of Anglophone HE institutions. However, at the same time research into ELF and particularly ELFA has underscored firstly that English typically exists in multilingual environments, even in Anglophone settings, and secondly that English is frequently adopted and adapted in a manner that meets both local and global, rather than Anglophone, needs and purposes. Such variable uses of English provides a strong counter, although not complete refutation, to the concerns over the dominance of Anglophone academic norms and illustrate the role of local agency in transcultural universities. Accompanying the multilingualism of the transcultural university is a parallel multiculturalism reflected in the diverse range of communities and cultures that students identify with often through the use of ELF. We therefore need to avoid essentialist correlations between ‘home’ and ‘host’ cultures and languages, particularly at the national level, and recognise the complexity and dynamism of identities and communities in transcultural universities. This situation also suggests that we need to educate students for this diversity and fluidity in order for them to gain from their experiences of mobility.

**The role of intercultural competence and awareness**

In order for students to be well prepared for academic mobility they need to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes to be able to engage successfully in intercultural communication. However, how we conceptualise this intercultural dimension is significant and the complexity of transcultural universities, as discussed previously, makes this a far from straightforward process. Much has been written about the importance of intercultural competence in sojourns abroad and a review of this would not be appropriate here. Focusing more specifically on applied linguistics and language education the notion of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) most closely associated with the work of Michael Byram (e.g. 1997; 2008) has been highly influential. Again this is a well discussed model and most likely familiar to readers of this journal so will not be explicated in detail here. However, there are a number of central features which are commensurable with the needs of students in transcultural universities. Firstly, the competence envisaged is the competence of an intercultural speaker, not a native speaker (Byram, 1997). This removes the inappropriate and undesirable notion of learners and users of additional languages needing to become native speakers of a language to be considered competent in it. Secondly, it represents a more holistic picture of language learners/users and the learning process including a range of knowledge, skills and attitudes related to intercultural communication; what Byram terms ‘the savoirs’ (1997, p. 50-54).Thirdly, the importance of mediation and negotiation in intercultural interaction is emphasised. Lastly, and central to ICC, is the concept of critical cultural awareness which underscores the need for language users to be able to take a critical perspective on practices and products in their own and other cultures.

Despite the importance of ICC in conceptualising the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for intercultural communication, there are a number of significant limitations in regard to the linguistic and cultural complexity present in transcultural universities. Most importantly is the focus on the national scale in ICC where language, culture and countries are correlated. So for example, critical cultural awareness is defined as “An ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in *one’s own and other cultures and countries*.” (1997, p. 53, emphasis mine), with the link between culture and country made explicit. However, as argued previously, the national scale is just one scale among many in relation to the cultures and communities that students may identify with. Furthermore, language and particularly English is treated unproblematically with an assumption that each setting will have an indefinable national language. For instance Byram advocates teaching British and US culture in relation to English (1997, p. 114). Yet, this is problematic in transcultural universities. In EMI settings the language of instruction will not be the same as the local language and in Anglophone settings the most appropriate use of English is unlikely to be native like English given the international audience (Jenkins, 2014). Therefore the linguistic and cultural landscape of transcultural universities is considerably more complex than ICC envisages.

Baker (2011; 2015) proposes a model of intercultural awareness[[7]](#endnote-7) (ICA) that, while building on Byram’s ICC, extends it to better account for the complexity and diversity of intercultural communication through ELF and other languages in transcultural universities. ICA is specifically focused on intercultural communication where there is no clear language, culture, nation correlation as if often the case when using ELF. Instead there is an emphasis on the need to employ intercultural competence and awareness in a flexible and situational specific manner in which national cultural groupings are just one of many possible cultural orientations. ICA is thus defined as:

*a conscious understanding of the role culturally based forms, practices and frames of reference can have in intercultural communication, and an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context specific manner in communication* (adapted from Baker 2011, p. 202).

Such a conception of the core competence or awareness needed for intercultural communication places an emphasis on general knowledge of the processes of intercultural communication rather than specific features. Although Baker (2011; 2015) provides a more detailed explanation of the features of ICA, the level is necessarily a general one since it is not possible to specify in advance exactly what knowledge, skills or strategies, such as the communicative/pragmatic strategies, linguistic forms, or cultural knowledge are needed by participants in intercultural communication. Given the diversity of interlocutors and their linguacultural backgrounds in transcultural universities no one could ever be prepared with specific knowledge of all the possible communicative practices. Furthermore, the dynamic nature of communicative practices in intercultural communication means that change and adaptation is inevitable. Successful communication will depend on being responsive to the situation and other participants.

At the same time though this does not suggest that communicative practices in transcultural universities are in some sort of post-modern ‘free-fall’ where nothing is predictable or established. There are, of course, still identifiable communities and cultures and associated communicative practices, including particular uses of language, such as academic communities or disciplines, national or regional communities and more ad hoc communities such as groups of international students. However, we need to avoid reifying such groupings and recognise their fluid and changeable nature. For example, we would clearly expect a lecture on a masters level course in electronic engineering in the UK to be delivered through English using terminology and genres associated with that particular academic discipline. We might also expect a substantial amount of English in the surrounding environment given the geographical location of the university. Nonetheless, at the same time, if the university is internationally orientated, many of the students, and possibly also the lecturer, will be using English as an L2 during the lecture. We can expect a large degree of multilingualism perhaps in the use of different L1s to take notes and in peer interactions, as well as the use of English as a lingua franca between participants from different linguacultural backgrounds. We would also expect this diversity to be extended to the wider university environment. Therefore, a balance is needed between knowledge and awareness of established communities and communicative practices, together with language choices, and adaptability and flexibility in regard to the complexity of any grouping, as well as the dynamic and emergent nature of many communicative practices in transcultural universities. Together with this knowledge and awareness, positive attitudes to such diversity should be developed.

**Educating mobile students for the transcultural university**

The traditional model of preparation for student mobility with its focus on a ‘standard’ form of a target language and a fixed nationally conceived culture associated with that language is no longer adequate for the complexity of transcultural universities. This is especially true for universities that use English both in Anglophone and EMI settings. Firstly, there is not one ‘standard’ English that is appropriate, as in EMI programmes and many postgraduate programmes in Anglophone settings English is most likely to be used as a lingua franca by non-native speakers of the language rather than native speakers of the language (assuming that native speakers use a ‘standard’ version of English). We would also expect variation in language use according to discipline and similarly in relation to the diverse linguacultural backgrounds of students and lectures. Additionally, English, or other languages, typically are not used in isolation and are part of multilingual linguistic landscapes. Students need to be prepared for this variation rather than focusing on mastering a single fixed ‘code’. This also calls in to question the validity of tests such as IELTS which are based on such fixed standard native speaker conceptions of English and undermines their value as a gatekeeper to academia (McNamara, 2014).

Secondly, just as concentrating on one form of English is inadequate; it is equally problematic to focus on a single national culture in student preparation. Again this is unlikely to prepare students for the complexity of the transcultural university where national cultures are just one grouping among many. However, national cultures are still likely to be present and are often very influential so such conceptualisations of culture cannot be ignored. But given the number of international students, particularly at postgraduate level, the national cultures that students and staff orientate to are likely to be very diverse and will not necessarily relate to the geographical setting of the university. Furthermore, in EMI settings the link between a national language and institutional language is broken and so simplistic language, culture, nation correlations cannot be assumed. Most significantly though national cultures are only one of many communities students and staff identify with. Arguably more relevant are disciplinary cultures which are typically transnational in nature. Also equally important are emergent groupings of other internationally mobile students of the type described by Kalocsai (2014) in which cultural practices, references and norms are highly situated and flexible. Again students must be prepared for this complexity and variability rather than given simplistic accounts and information concerning ‘local’ national cultural norms.

One approach that is more suited to preparation for student mobility in transcultural universities is an ELF informed pedagogy. While there is no ‘ELF pedagogy’, since ELF research is typically a description and theorisation of language use and practices, not a teaching method, *ELF informed* approaches attempt to translate the findings from ELF research into meaningful classroom practices and to better prepare learners and users of English for the fluidity of communication through ELF. This entails a move away from standard English norms, or any other set of norms, towards what Dewey (2012; 2015) refers to as ‘post-normative’ pedagogy. This is central as there are no fixed norms associated with ELF communication and so ELF cannot be taught in the traditional sense of a language model. Instead findings from ELF research can be used to inform how English and communication/intercultural communication are presented to language learners. Thus, rather than teaching a predetermined code, language is taught as variable and dynamic. Alongside linguistic knowledge, pragmatic and communication strategies are presented as central in enabling language users to negotiate this variability. Furthermore, there is a focus on the processes of language learning and use rather than on the products (Seidlhofer, 2011). Empirical studies such as Galloway have documented the importance of explicitly teaching learners about “the sociolinguistic realities of English and how these relate to learning English” (2013, p. 786) and the influence this can have on learners’ beliefs and attitudes about language use and communication. In addition to enhanced linguistic awareness in ELT, Baker (2011; 2015) proposes that this needs to be accompanied by intercultural awareness. This directly addresses the cultural and intercultural dimensions of an ELF informed pedagogy with learners introduced to the variable nature of identities and cultures in intercultural communication. ICA, as described above, outlines a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes which enable successful intercultural communication and Baker (2015) suggests principles for making these part of classroom practice. These include: 1. Exploring the complexity of local cultures; 2. exploring cultural representations in language learning materials; 3. exploring cultural representations in the media and arts both online and in more ‘traditional’ mediums; 4. making use of cultural informants; 5. engaging in intercultural communication both face to face and electronically (Baker 2015, p. 195-198). An attempt to put these principles into practice through a course in intercultural communication and global Englishes for Thai university students demonstrated both the feasibility of such an approach and the positive reaction, particularly in terms of perceived relevance, such materials generated from both students and teachers (Baker, 2015). Further empirical studies in classroom settings are still needed but early research, such as that collected in Bayyurt and Akcan (2015), shows that alternative perspectives to the typical standard ‘national’ language and culture approach are possible and often well received by key stakeholders.

In relation to student mobility there are also parallel examples of approaches and research that move beyond a focus on national cultures. Beaven and Borghetti’s report on the IEREST (Intercultural Education Resources for Erasmus Students and their Teachers) project states that “The IEREST materials and activities are based on a non-essentialist paradigm, according to which 'interculturality' does not mean comparing two or more countries, nor learning to adapt to a specific ‘national culture” (2014, p. 8). Similarly, the collection of empirical studies based on the project collected in Beaven and Borghetti (2015), also approach culture and identity as negotiated and constructed. For example, Borghetti et al. (2015) investigate the co-construction of intercultural learning spaces in student classroom interaction and the influence this may have on students’ sense of interculturality and development of intercultural awareness. Research such as this offers practical examples of integrating the intercultural dimension into education for student mobility in a way that avoids essentialist and stereotypical perspectives and better prepares students for transcultural universities. Nonetheless, although language is a concern in these studies, the focus is not specifically on English and ELF. Given the current status of English in HE, further research is needed that investigates the relationships between education, intercultural communication, interculturality, and student mobility, in which the role of ELF in multilingual and intercultural communication is explored.

**Conclusion**

The focus of this discussion has been on HE settings which make use of English as the medium of instruction either in Anglophone settings or EMI programmes. However, English does not exist in isolation but instead is part of a multilingual and multicultural landscape and most frequently used as a lingua franca. The term transcultural university has been adopted to emphasise the complexity of such environments in which national scales for languages and cultures are just one of many. This has significant implications for how we educate students for mobility. The goal can no longer be knowledge and competence in a single ‘standard’ form of a language and an associated ‘target culture’ and associated cultural practices. Instead, students need linguistic and intercultural awareness to be able to cope with the complexity and variability of communicative practices in which negotiation and adaptation are central. This needs to be integrated into pedagogy and a number of examples were given from ELF informed pedagogy and contemporary research into intercultural education and student mobility in which essentialist approaches to language and culture were replaced by perspectives that emphasised the negotiated nature of communication, identity and community. Drawing together a number of the themes presented in this paper we can conclude that mobile students need equally mobile resources and that accompanying student mobility is a mobility of languages, communities and cultures in higher education.

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**Notes**

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1. ELF here is defined as “*any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often only option*” (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 7, italics in original). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Discussions of globalisation are beyond the scope of this article but it can be roughly characterised as an umbrella term for a number of related processes. Scholte sums these up as “the spread of transplanetary - and in recent times also more particularly supraterritorial – connections between people. From this perspective, globalisation involves reductions in barriers to transworld social contacts. People become more able - physically, legally, linguistically, culturally and psychologically – to engage with each other wherever on earth they might be.”(2008, p. 1478) [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Ryan (2011) has also proposes a ‘transcultural’ approach to understanding international universities. Although I was unaware of her work at the time of writing the first draft of this paper there are many similarities in her suggestions for example sharing a perspective of going beyond the bounded ‘inter’ perspective on culture. However, Ryan neglects to mention language anywhere in her discussion. A major omission, in my opinion, since the spread of English is a key part of internationalisation and thus language and multilingualism are at the core of any transcultural approach. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. For example, Byram and Dervin (2008) do not mention the role of English once in their introduction to a volume on academic mobility. Although Jackson (2012) in her overview of education abroad does deal with language and recognises that English is now an increasingly prominent part of HE, she does not explore the implications of this and reverts to the traditional ‘target’ language and culture perspective. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. There is not space here to provide detailed explanations of each of these terms but see Jenkins (2015) for a good overview. However, they all share a concern with the limitations of artificially isolating linguistic resources in terms of specific languages in research into communicative practices in ‘superdiverse’(Vertovec, 2006) settings. Furthermore, for ease of reading and to connect to previous research the terms multilingualism and multicultural will be used in this paper, but the limitations of these terms are recognised. Languages and cultures do not have to be multiple they may also be hybrid and more fluid than the multi prefix suggests. Partly for this reason the term transcultural university is adopted. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Additionally, the settings of many transcultural universities in equally superdiverse urban centres further problematizes the notion of an identifiable host culture to which students need to acculturate. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Awareness here is extended from its usual meaning to cover knowledge, attitudes and skills but is preferred as a more holistic term to ‘competence’ given the problematic nature of the competence/performance distinction in intercultural communication. Furthermore, as noted earlier in the discussion the term inter in intercultural is potentially problematic in reifying distinct cultures. The term transcultural might be better, however, for consistency with previous research and ease of reading the term ‘inter’ has been retained (see Baker, 2011; 2015 for detailed discussions of this concept ) [↑](#endnote-ref-7)