



How good are their intercultural communication skills? International students cast judgement on home students and staff.

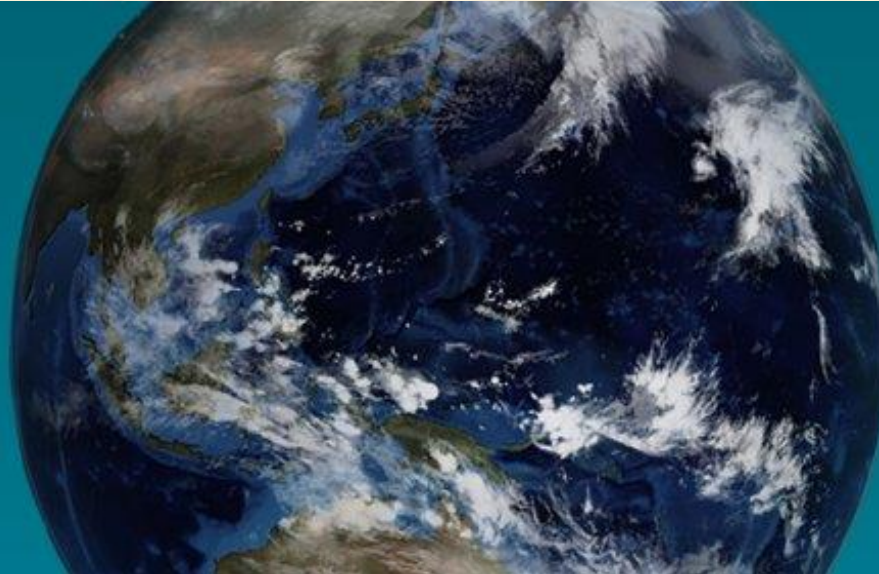
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Intercultural Connections conference

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University of Southampton

Global connections



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We are a **truly international institution** with a global reputation for excellence in leading-edge research. **Students from more than 135 different nations study here** and our network of university partnerships span (*sic*) the globe.

Studying in the UK

Join the University of Southampton's **vibrant international student community**. You will receive a warm welcome and plenty of support to help you succeed.

We welcome students from more than 130 countries each year, so you will receive a warm welcome when you join **our diverse University community**.

Over 6,500 international students from more than 135 countries choose to study at the University of Southampton each year. In addition we have links with universities and partners around the world, making **us a truly international institution** [until it comes to language].

Social life

On campus, it couldn't be easier to **meet** and **mix** with your fellow students. You can make new friends, play a full part in the University community, and make your University life truly memorable.

A “diverse” “international” community: but what about language-wise?

English language entry requirements

International students need to demonstrate that they have **sufficient knowledge of English language in order to be able to benefit from and participate in all academic activities** at the University of Southampton.

Accepted Tests and Test Scores for English Language Certification

The required certification in English Language should normally have been obtained within the last **two** years.

IELTS 6.5 TOEFL paper-based test 580 TOEFL internet-based test 92

UPDATE: The University is also now recognising the Pearsons PTE Academic Qualification (minimum score for entry on to undergraduate programmes: 51 in each band with a minimum of 62 overall.

“Truly international” and “diverse”? Only if you’re a native English speaker

IELTS, for example

(IELTS Guide for Teachers, June 2013, p.11)

International English

IELTS recognises **both British and American English** in terms of spelling, grammar and choice of words. It also incorporates a mix of **native speaker accents from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and US** in the Listening component (ibid.)

International content

The test questions are developed by **item writers in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the US.**

Conversations with international students in the University of Southampton

Main themes:

- Understanding the English of others
- Concerns about academic English writing
- English language entry tests
- Issues of fairness
- Orientations to English/ELF

(See Jenkins 2014, Chapter 7)

Home students in seminars

- J: and erm (.) when you're (1) what (.) do you have seminars?
- S: Oh: @@ seminars the first year is VERY bad for me very bad because very fast er it it er I think it's normal problem I mean common problem er for Thai students
- J: seminars
- S: er yes seminar because the British students discuss together and Thai students have some problems about listening so they er cannot catch what they say
- J: so (.) the British students do all the talking?
- S: OH: they're talking all the time [@@@
- J: [@@@
- S: because they're talking (.) they (feel free) so (.) very fast

[...]

Contd.

[...]

J: so it's difficult for all the international students (.) do you talk about it together?

S: @@@

J: @@@

S: when I talk talk to my Thai friends they told me they're quiet [@@ they can NOT

J: [@@

S: follow er they cannot er: can don't catch what they say

J: [yeah

S: [if if they understand but they have to: er: provide the answer sometimes (they're) very slowly and they talk about another topic @@@

J: @@@ they they're on the next topic

S: yeah

J: when you're @ ready to start the last topic @@

S: yeah @@ oh, don't laugh

(Thai student)

Accommodation among NNES students in seminars in an EMI setting

Iino & Murata (2013) found in their study of first year SILS seminars at Waseda, that they are characterised by **slow tempo in turn taking, code-switching, and other forms of accommodation**, which leads them to conclude that “the students are careful in making sure that everybody participates in seminar discussions” (pp. 92-3).

What about students “mixing” socially?

The conventional position on international students:

Several lecturers “believed that international students were inclined to stay in their own cultural groups and were unwilling to mix with home students [and that] it was the responsibility of international students to seek interaction with native speakers and, as one interviewee put it, ‘**come out of their ghettos**’ ” (Jenkins & Wingate 2015).

According to this view, if international students don’t “mix” with home students, it’s their own fault.

International students see things differently

“ ... as many [international student] participants pointed out, **they spend a lot of time in each other's company**. Home students and staff on the other hand, apparently spend little time interacting with international students” (Jenkins 2014, p. 203).

- International students talked of being able to network across their different L1 groups as a main positive feature of their life in the University.
- They also said they felt home students didn't want to mix with them because it involved a lot of effort.

... when I come here I find some things er maybe a little different yeah it's different er er er: because like you said it's VERY international (.) people from India from Poland Greek their their pronunciation their English is a little bit more or less different from native speakers such as Indian I I can hardly understand that before but er it's much better NOW because I communicate with that guy very much every day

(Chinese student)

Erasmus students say similar

I see that if I'm in the middle of people that are not English and they're speaking English and so there is no problem understanding them. Probably **my obstacle was that to understand like really English people [= British students] talking ...**

There were two English Erasmus girls [...] **they were always together** and uh...all the other Erasmus students were always saying that they were **very closed** and they **didn't tend to let the other people understand really.**

[Italian Erasmus student, LINEE project data]

International v home students

The nature of international students' experience [in UK universities] may ... provide them with a **changed perspective** on what it means to live, study and socialize with people from different cultures” and thus “**to develop intercultural competences** that may contribute to their professional and personal futures.

This self-awareness and wider intercultural view of self being developed in the international student may be contrasted with **a more monocultural experience of some [most?] home students**” (Montgomery 2010: 97).

Example of home students' lack of intercultural awareness despite the best of intentions.



ATTENTION!!
TO ALL INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND THEIR PARTNERS...

- Have you heard or seen words or phrases that you don't understand, but cannot find them in a dictionary? (*Slang*)
- Are punch-lines (the funny bit) of jokes and the British humour sometimes difficult to understand properly?
- Is there a grammar point that you find very difficult to use?
- Would you like to know what to say /write in a particular situation?

 If you have ANY queries about the English language, please come to **The Drop-in Language Clinic** 

Drop-in = a quick visit
Clinic = a place for help, advice & instruction

3.30pm to 4.30pm Tuesdays & Thursdays during term time at SUAIC, Level 1, Building 40, Highfield Campus, University Road.
Email: englishtutor@susu.org

An international student, by contrast

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An international student argues that home students need a course in IC skills

They [home students] have to show respect to all accents and all the people the way they speak. They have to respect all the way that they speak, because sometimes the people who are really good in English they might make fun of the others or try to correct them, like they don't be modest at all. This happens, I have seen a few times actually in some places, so this is not really good, and there should maybe be some lessons that can teach some people like classes to communicate for the native speakers to internationals, and yes this would be really helpful actually, yeah, to communicate all together.

[Turkish student]

Native English lecturers: Telling jokes

- S: some of my teachers they use the vocabulary or they use some very difficult vocabulary
- J: do you think it's that or do they do things do they use very idiomatic English language (1) sort of what the native speakers know [but
- S: [mm mm mm yes and some jokes he made and ah ah I can't UNDERSTAND and other people ha ha but I don't know why=
- J: =yes a lot of students have said that to me that the lecturers tell jokes and [everyone's laughing
- S: [Yeah, yeah
- J: and one of them said so I just laugh [@@@@
- S: [@@@@
- J: it's difficult isn't [it
- S: [yeah yeah and er I ask my friend why you are laughing and erm [@@@
- J: [@@@ they're pretending (.) they don't really understand the joke at all
- S: mmmm [Chinese student]

“Everyone laugh, but I can’t understand that,
but I just follow the laughter the laughing
point is different”.

[Korean student]

Question and answer

S: mm not problems understanding the lecture but there is problems with communicating with the lecturer (.) sometimes

J: [how

S: [when they ask questions. I think that the the lecturer prepares er obviously prepares the presentation of the of the [course the class (.) prepares the

J: [yeah

S: lecture (1) but when it comes to the questions (2) erm they don't have time to prepare the answer so **the answer just comes without any filter**

J: yeah yeah

S: so (.) sometimes it it's a little bit er er complex interaction between student and er professor (.) because sometimes the professor doesn't understand student and student doesn't understand professor so **it's like a loop of bad communication** er and that's why I think that's why sometimes they go with other fellow students to go through er the slides =

J: = do they sometimes ask YOU to help them?

S: well we have (.) we have in our programme we have a facebook community

J: ah so you all get onto facebook and ask what the lecture was about =

S: = erm what's this about what's the question about

[Mexican student]

Trivial approach to American English (even though the University accepts TOEFL)

S: all of them they want British one=

J: =British spelling?

S: so (.) in my exams I have to make sure that I put *u* and put *s* and not *zee*

J: and you have enough to think about in an exam I mean if you're in not a first language if you're not a native speaker of English doing an exam must be SO difficult=

S: =very difficult (.) my first exams I was panic (.) I said oh my god I don't know what how to deal with this (.) just three questions and I have to write everything down as fast as possible that's why I feel it's very difficult [Thai student]

Saudi student: "Does it matter?". Supervisor: "Yes, it matters".

And what about 'standard' British English? The 'in-on' saga....

Double standards in academic writing

... sometimes you know I find that my writing is I find it a bit RIGID and I find it that you know if I am to be very aware and cautious of the fact that I HAVE to use English you know in a in a er: correct grammatical grammatically correct manner then some of my you know that creativity and that you know that DRIVES words you know writing is LOST somehow (.) because I you know it's about self constraint and you know self censorship as well and (.) yeah and (.) when that happens you know I feel like after you know after a while re-reading my my (1) my essay or article I feel like hmm this is sounds like quite RIGID it's quite rigid yeah [EU student]

A more appropriate approach to academic writing in international universities

“As international students form an ever-growing proportion of the student population in our institutions, we can no longer expect them to ‘fit in’ with a system designed primarily for a home-grown student body”.

(Bailey 2013).

Native English lecturers need a course in intercultural communication too

J: [I mean do you think the lecturers need – the native English lecturers need some training in how to make themselves understood to international students?

S: I think I think it would be really helpful **because the students on the other hand the students are doing their BEST to try to communicate** (1) I remember one of our students my fellow students that: erm in the beginning of the semester er he used to write the questions beforehand (.) and then when it came to the part do you have any questions he read the questions from the from the notebook (3) from the notebook he had to prepare the questions beforehand

J: mm mm

S: but then the the **the lecturer has to be has to understand the situation of the student** (.) so I think **that it would be useful for international students to have the lecturers like if the lecturers can get some** (1) erm some kind of course

[Mexican student]

Summing up the ISs' judgements

The international student participants (regardless of their discipline, level, L1, prior university education) found home students and lecturers to:

- *tell (native English) culture-specific jokes*
- *use local (native English) idioms*
- *speak very fast, as if to each other*
- *lack accommodation skills*
- *expect all adjustments to be made by ISs students ('assimilate', 'acculturate', 'socialise')*

= business as usual – as if this was a national university in the 1980s, not an international one in 2015.

The research highlights the need for

a move away from the current **monolingual, normative-oriented** attitudes that prevail among staff and students – or the “**one-way traffic**” approach, as a research participant put it,

to an approach in which **all are required to make adjustments**, English is seen a **tool of communication not an end in itself**, and the goal of English use is **mutual intelligibility**, not conformity to a particular kind of native English.

“Work done in ELF [is] demonstrating the inappropriateness of continuing to prioritise native English norms at a time when English has become an academic lingua franca used by widely diverse student and staff populations in ways that have been shown to diverge effectively from NES students’ English use” (Jenkins & Wingate 2015).

“... the growing awareness of the nature of English as a lingua franca communication overturns all the givens of the communicative movement as it has developed over the last 30 or 40 years. The distinction between native and non-native speaker competence [in English], which lies at the heart of the movement, can no longer be sustained; we need a radical reconceptualization of the construct of successful communication that does not depend on this distinction”

(McNamara 2014)

So above all: education in intercultural communication

“This would enable [staff and students] to recognise the **benefits of international students enriching the university with their multilingual and multicultural resources**, as well as the **need to improve their own intercultural communication skills**, rather than expecting international students to adapt linguistically to old national models of UK higher education” (Jenkins & Wingate 2015).

This is where Intercultural Connections comes in!

New cross-university research project: Diamond Jubilee Fellowship project

Universities participating

One each in: Australia, China, Finland, Japan, Italy, Malaysia, Netherlands, Spain, UK

Research questions (summarised)

1. What are the overt/covert English language expectations of/made of students and staff?
2. What similarities and differences emerge across the nine research settings? Are there any particularly noticeable differences between the EMI settings and the English dominant settings?



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That's all - thanks for listening!

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