Decolonising the English Language Teaching Curriculum: liminality and troublesome knowledge through a Global North-South Virtual Exchange
Outline

• Definition of Virtual Exchange
• Project VETSDELT (Virtual Exchange as a Third Space to Decolonise English Language Teaching)
• Findings
• Discussion on troublesome knowledge and liminality tensions (see refs for liminality in Lucy Hatt’s presentation yesterday) going forward
Definition of VE (Helm, 2018)

“a practice, supported by research, that consists of sustained, technology enabled, people-to-people education programmes or activities in which constructive communication and interaction takes place between individuals or groups who are geographically separated and/or from different cultural backgrounds, with the support of educators or facilitators. Virtual Exchange combines the deep impact of intercultural dialogue and exchange with the broad reach of digital technology”
More recent definition of VE for English language teacher education

“a postmodern approach to second language teacher education that fits well with Kumaravadivelu’s (2012) post-method principles of particularity (situational understanding of the teaching context), practicality (autonomous approach to theory and practice with teachers as agents of their own theorisation from their own practice) and possibility (awareness of the socio-cultural factors affecting teachers’ circumstances and their ability to be/become agents of change). Virtual Exchange is also a fertile and decolonised Third Space (Bhabha & Rutherford, 2006), a transformative - and often challenging - experience in second language teacher education, that can help all participants with acquiring new competences and rethink their beliefs and worldview through a lens that is both local and global”

(Fuchs & Orsini-Jones, 2022)
AIMS:

• To investigate the potential of Virtual Exchange (VE) to stimulate a critical discussion on how to decolonise English Language Teaching (ELT), focusing mainly on the native-speakerism ideology (in the context of English teacher education) at
• To provide students in English language teacher education (some pre- and some in-service) and English language teachers and trainers with the opportunity to re-examine and reflect on their existing belief systems about English and ELT. VETDSELT aimed in particular at deconstructing the ‘native-speakerism’ ideology (Holliiday, 2006) through a dialogic intercultural exchange
Native-speakerism (Holliday)

- **Native-speakerism** is a pervasive ideology within ELT, characterised by the belief that ‘native-speaker’ teachers represent a ‘Western culture’ from which spring the ideals both of the English language and of English language teaching methodology (Holliday, 2005)

Implied superiority of the UK/USA English variant
Through the looking glass - Student initiated curricular change

Action-research and threshold concepts informed ‘role-reversal’

Curricular integration at CovUni

- VETSDELT fully integrated into module Theories and Methods of Language Learning and Teaching (15 creds)

- MA in English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (Sept and Jan start)

- VE themes part of the assessment: questions on the experience of taking part in the VE part of the viva task (7.5 credits)
Question 4 viva

Question 4 Reflecting on your journey as a teacher or future teacher of English language

- Discuss what you have learned from this module and from the VE/COIL experience - you must refer to the literature and lessons provided in AULA. Be prepared to discuss:
  1. Can you define ‘native speakerism’?
  2. Have your beliefs about language learning and teaching changed in the course of this module?
  3. What does Kumaravadivelu argue about methods in language learning and teaching?
  4. What does ‘decolonising ELT’ mean?
  5. How did you find the experience of taking part in a VE/COIL project for your professional development as a teacher of English language?
Social Justice dimension

- What is English?
- Whose is English?

Topics

**Session 1**
13 March 2023

**Varieties of English**

A collaborative initiative
Coventry University (CoU), UK
Gazi University (GzU), Turkey
Sichuan International Studies University (SISU), China
Universidade Estadual Paulista (UNESP), Brazil
X’ian Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU), China

**Session 2**
20 March 2023

**Beliefs, ideologies, and attitudes**

A collaborative initiative
Coventry University (CoU), UK
Gazi University (GzU), Turkey
Sichuan International Studies University (SISU), China
Universidade Estadual Paulista (UNESP), Brazil
X’ian Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU), China

**Session 3**
27 March 2023

**Native-speakerism**

A collaborative initiative
Coventry University (CoU), UK
Gazi University (GzU), Turkey
Sichuan International Studies University (SISU), China
Universidade Estadual Paulista (UNESP), Brazil
X’ian Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU), China

**Session 4**
3 April 2023

**Teaching English as a Global Language**

A collaborative initiative
Coventry University (CoU), UK
Gazi University (GzU), Turkey
Sichuan International Studies University (SISU), China
Universidade Estadual Paulista (UNESP), Brazil
X’ian Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU), China
Participants

**Cycle 1**
November-December 2022
Four institutions
Brazil
Spain
Sri Lanka
UK

44 participants

11 Nationalities
Brazilian, Chinese, Indian, Italian, Nigerian, Pakistani, Romanian, Spanish, Sri Lankan, Taiwanese, and Vietnamese

**Cycle 2**
March-April 2023
5 institutions
Brazil
China
Turkey
UK

61 participants

12 Nationalities
Bangladeshi, Brazilian, Chinese, Italian, Malaysian, Nigerian, Romanian, Spanish, South Korean, Thai, Turkish, and Vietnamese
# Session Plan

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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Introduction/Presentation of the weekly topic</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Task setting</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Discussion on the topic in breakout rooms (BoRs) facilitated by e-mediators, posting of group reflections on the relevant Padlet Wall and selection of the speaker from each BoR who reports back</td>
<td>25 minutes</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Reporting from each BoR</td>
<td>10 minutes (around 2 mins per group)</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Short formative whole group interactive activity on the session</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Completion of a short anonymous evaluation Microsoft Form for the session</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Wrap up and preview of the session to follow + Q&amp;A</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
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Breakout Room Discussions supported by trained e-mediators 

(Cycle 1)

Native speakers are preferred to get jobs over non-native speakers, but I think that non-native speakers outnumber the native speakers, so the teachers should be selected on their qualifications and relevant experiences. On linguistic grounds, in India, English is one of the official languages. So, that is not the case when we seek jobs in schools or colleges. However, when I was trying to apply for an online English teacher job, there I faced this challenge where they prefer only native speakers.

- teacher formation
- approach different English varieties in class materials
- consider culture/background of learners - acceptance/feeling of belonging
- it does not affect all native speakers the same way because some non-native speakers live in countries where English is the official language - so they are the preferred options in terms of hiring practices.
- intelligibility
- racism
- discrimination - schools prefer native speakers rather than NNES

1 - In language schools they prefer the accent, they prefer to hire native speaker even if they don't have teaching qualification. But we believe that teaching qualification is more important than being native.
- This idea that native is better is changing slowly.
- We can learn different types of English other than British or native. In some cases, it is not even necessary to learn British English (e.g., in India), because they don't really go to Britain. Still, schools have the preference to British English, especially the accent due to the historical background.

Summary group 4

Native speakers are not the best to teach "their" language. If you want to be a good "native speaker" teacher you have to learn how to teach the language as other speakers, including learning the language itself. Being a "native speaker" is not so relevant, although some students think that "native" accent would be better for students. Some students disagree with that because accent and pronunciation are not the most important thing to be a good teacher, you need some specific skills to be a good teacher apart...
Breakout Room Discussions supported by trained e-mediators (Cycle 2)
Online Survey ‘shock’ finding: misunderstanding of the concept of ‘native-speakerism’ by Holliday that was amply discussed during the exchange

| Question: ‘What do you understand by ‘native speakerism’? Please define it in your own words’ |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| **Cycle 1**                                      | **Cycle 2**                                      |
| “For me, the native speakerism is a person who speaks a language from the country where he has born” (Spanish participant) | “The concept is about the belief that one should speak like a native, that being the only correct one” (Brazilian participant) |
| “People who speaks their native language” (Spanish participant) | “Speakers of a native English speaking country” (Bangladeshi participant) |
Percentages

- Post-project survey Cohort 1: 26/44 = 34% return %
  Of these 15/26 (57%) gave answers that demonstrated either total misunderstanding of the concept or liminality in understanding

- Post-project survey cohort 2: 25/61 = 16% return %
  Of these 10/25 (40%) gave answers that demonstrated either total misunderstanding of the concept or liminality in understanding
However, evidence of positive transformational impact of VETSDELT for most participants

It facilitated reflections on challenging teacher beliefs about the ‘canon’ and language standards through global perspectives

Has VETSDELT affected your previous beliefs about English in general and learning/teaching/use/ownership of English in particular?

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<td>“Absolutely, I have discovered a lot of new things through it and it has made me think about issues I had never thought about before.” (Spanish participant)</td>
<td>“Definitely. It was really challenging to see different ideas about English in ELT field.” (Turkish participant)</td>
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<td>“[VETSDELT] made me think about the ownership of the English language. [...] ‘native speakers’ are an unrealistic model to imitate.” (Italian/Spanish participant)</td>
<td>“Thanks to VETSDELT, meeting and discussing with people from many parts of the world on the same ground has broadened my perspective in this respect.’ (Turkish participant)</td>
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Evidence of transformational impact of VETSDELT (2)

It helped the participants to reflect on ideologies and beliefs and the way they are shaped by cultural and social perceptions both locally and globally

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<td>“It [VETSDELT] has definitely broaden my mind and helped me feel understood when it comes to non native teacher problems.” (Spanish participant)</td>
<td>“This project affects by beliefs about English and teaching of English.” (Turkish participant)</td>
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<td>“I have learned many things such as some stereotypes of society or the types of English that exist and the importance of all of them equally.” (Spanish participant)</td>
<td>“[…] especially my beliefs about 'lingua franca' and 'English as an International Language' have changed a lot.” (Turkish participant)</td>
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Evidence of transformational impact of VETSDELT (3)

It exposed the participants to different varieties of English, made them feel more at ease

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<td>“I felt great because most of my peers are non-native”</td>
<td>“It is a very precious opportunity to communicate with people from countries and exchange our ideas as well as cultural knowledge”</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Brazilian participant)</td>
<td>(Chinese participant)</td>
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<td>“It was a good experience and it was interesting to see how other cultures speak and learn English.”</td>
<td>“It felt awesome. I was anxious at first but I liked it afterwards. I heard different local Englishes and communicate with ELT teachers from many countries”</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Spanish participant)</td>
<td>(Turkish participant)</td>
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BUT also evidence of engrained beliefs

- Some participants could not ‘let go’ of the ‘native-speakerism’ ideology

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<td>I think that the <strong>native speakers have the perfect accent</strong> [...] (Spanish participant)</td>
<td>[...] I may think it is better for them [kids] to <strong>follow a L1 teacher to learn beautiful accent</strong> [...] (Chinese participant)</td>
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<td>[...] I feel I don’t have <strong>good pronunciation like a native speaker</strong> (Spanish participant)</td>
<td>“I thought English can only be accepted if you strictly follow the standard Native speakerism rules laid out” (Nigerian participant)</td>
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Their belief in ‘native-speakerism’ was also illustrated by their lack of confidence to communicate in English on the exchange (anxiety very high amongst Brazilians in cohort 2)

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<td>“I felt embarrassed to talk in the big group but not in the breakout rooms” (Brazilian participant)</td>
<td>“[I felt] Lost and insecure, because I believe that the understanding of reasoning was at a high level in my case.” (Brazilian participant)</td>
</tr>
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<td>“I did not feel very comfortable, as there were people who communicated very well in English and having a different accent made it difficult for me to understand certain things” (Spanish participant)</td>
<td>“I felt a little nervous, because my colleagues are more fluid than I am in speech.” (Brazilian participant)</td>
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Tension (focus group interviews to triangulate findings from the survey held face-to-face at Coventry University with CovUni students only)

- Pride in being on a British course taught by British staff
- Prestige of UK English (India, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Nigeria) or USA English (South Korea, Vietnam)
- Evidence of having had exposure to UK or USA English can be advantageous on the job market
- Pride in colonial identity (if applicable) and heritage

BUT
- Frustration at structures that favour L1 speakers from the UK/USA in ELT
- Frustration at management attitudes towards multilingualism in schools in areas where many languages are spoken and English is the Lingua Franca (e.g.: Nigeria)
Decolonising ELT and Native Speakerism

Threshold concepts?

• Liminality in understanding

• Oscillation around the threshold

• Troublesome colonial heritage
Last conference: added troublesome dimension

COIL-VE a Threshold Concept? (Forthcoming Nov, Gold Open Access)

The learners will often find it problematic

It takes learners out of their comfort zone

It challenges their ‘being’ (ontology) and their existing knowledge (epistemology)

However, once understood, its potential effect on student learning and behaviour is to occasion a significant shift in the perception of a subject

It exposes the previously hidden interrelatedness of concepts that were not previously seen as linked

Work in progress…please let us have your thoughts on mentimeter

Marina Orsini-Jones
m.orsini@coventry.ac.uk
Carlos Hildeblando
hildeblanc@uni.coventry.ac.uk
Kyria Rebeca Neiva de Lima Finardi
kyria.finardi@ufes.br

https://www.mentimeter.com/
CODE: 41123026