Draft text about my research

Title (tentative)

Rethinking telecollaboration between proficient speakers and emergent speakers of English to eschew the traps of monolingualism and native speaker ideology.

Internationalization-at-home (IaH)

Mission statements of most U.S. universities contain references to the importance of internationalization and global understanding. The most visible initiative enacted to foster intercultural competence is student mobility. Before 2020, the main problem connected to study-abroad programs was cost, but the Covid-19 pandemic added a tremendous obstacle to student mobility, thus demanding that we have more conversations on internationalization-at-home (IaH) initiatives. In a position paper on IaH, Crowther et al. (2000) observe that "the introduction of international and intercultural elements into the curriculum may influence the content (and even goals) of university education over a longer period of time and for a larger number of students and be more effective than mere student mobility" (p. 21). Among several types of IaH initiatives, my focus is on international virtual exchange (see Mousten et al., 2018).

Virtual exchange and telecollaboration

"Virtual exchange" is an umbrella term used to designate a wide range of collaborative projects that link classes in different countries. Virtual exchange initiatives often stem within the area of foreign language education with educators connecting language learners with counterparts in other countries. According to Helm (2015),

Telecollaboration is the practice of engaging classes of geographically dispersed learners in online intercultural exchange using Internet communication tools for the development of language and/or intercultural competence (p. 197).

In the last 25 years, several models have emerged, involving different types of students to achieve a variety of goals. But in most of the many cases the focus has been too much on developing language skills. This is understandable considering that most of the courses linked in telecollaboration projects are foreign language courses, especially English as a foreign language courses. However, it is important to keep in mind that telecollaboration should not focus solely on skills, but rather on attitudes toward exchange and communication in an interconnected world. It is great that students involved in telecollaboration learn about pronunciation, vocabulary, and idiomatic expressions used in everyday life by their peers abroad. But is that it? Do we want students just to imitate each other?

A complex case: Telecollaboration between emergent and proficient users of English

In this study, the labels “proficient speaker” and “emergent speaker” replace the labels “native” and “non-native,” which do not capture the complexity and diversity in the use of English in times of increased mobility and contact between people from different backgrounds (Blommaert and Rampton, 2011). Like Cook observes, L2 learners can attain a high level of proficiency in both spoken and written English, thus becoming *L2 users* (Cook, 1999, p. 196). In this study, the term “proficient speakers” refers to both native speakers and *L2 users*. The term “emergent speakers” will designate a wide range of individuals who typically use English as a lingua franca. Most of these speakers will find it difficult to understand idiomatic language used by proficient speakers to reinforce group identity.

When telecollaboration involves proficient speakers of English and emergent speakers of English, the problem of learning outcomes becomes even more complex. In this case, the focus is on one language, which should be understood as a lingua franca without owners. And yet, in this kind of project the risk is to present native speakers as experts and emergent speakers as learners who have an opportunity to be exposed to native English, the only type of English worth learning.

There are two main problems with this approach:

First it assumes that standard English is a stable and discrete code that will facilitate mutual understanding in most types of communicative situations. The ideologies of monolingualism and native-speakerism present language as fixed, self-standing, and ‘immune’ from the influence of cultural, political, and economic forces that shape our communicative behaviors. These ideologies make us see linguistic difference as “a defining problem for and a characteristic of the socially different” (Lu and Horner, p. 583). Strangers and cultural Others tend to be defined by what they lack, native-like linguistic fluency, while their ability to speak several languages, their accommodation skills, and their ability to deploy cross-cultural rhetorical strategies often go unnoticed.

Second, by placing the burden of conforming to standards on emergent speakers alone because it is their job to ‘rise’ to some idealized level of linguistic and discursive competence, we are telling students that accommodation proceeds along a one way road that requires emergent speakers to imitate native or proficient-speaker levels of usage in order to exchange ideas and information. What about the role of proficient speakers of English in intercultural communication? If we think about speakers of American English born and raised in the US, especially those living far from big cities, it is safe to assume that most of them have always lived in relatively homogenous communities, and have rarely interacted with speakers of other languages. For this reason, they often lack the accommodation skills that emergent speakers develop through sustained practice. In contrast, emergent speakers who interact using ELF are generally aware that they cannot depend on shared lingua-cultural conventions, and, for this reason, gradually develop an ability to monitor and adjust to their interlocutors.

Organizing a telecollaboration in English can be beneficial to students if educators present communication in a lingua franca as an adventure in mediation and accommodation; if educators introduce the concept of English as a lingua franca and explain how communication in ELF requires an ability to constantly calibrate linguistic and rhetorical strategies to meet the needs of diverse audiences. Proficient speakers of English cannot

assume that they can successfully interact with emergent speakers. To communicate effectively, all users of English need to develop attitudes of openness and genuine interest in other cultures, a degree of linguistic sensitivity, and a willingness to bend linguistic conventions to accommodate others to establish nonhierarchical and long-lasting relations with people from different backgrounds. I agree with Helm (2013) that language education should be concerned not only with instrumental aims but also humanistic ones, and should promote intercultural dialogue and understanding.

Theoretical framework

My focus on international virtual exchange is connected to research conducted within the paradigms of translingualism and English as a lingua franca.

Translingualism

Two basic tenets of the translingual approach are particularly relevant for this study: First, Horner, NeCamp, and Donahue (2011) interrogate the myth of native-like fluency and advocate for the competing paradigm of translingual and transcultural competence. They argue that focus should be on mutual intelligibility rather than fluency because different contexts of interaction will call for a strategic (rather than norm-based) use of linguistic resources (2011, p. 287).

Even more importantly, translingual scholars describe all language use as an act of translation inter and intra languages (Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur, 2011; Horner, NeCamp, and Donahue, 2011; Lu and Horner, 2016). The word “translation” evokes the key concepts of negotiation and accommodation, which characterize ethical communication practices in global lingua francas.

I agree with Donahue (2018) that, in a translingual frame, “it isn’t English that matters to Composition, but rather *adaptability* in language that joins the adaptability we already know writers must have across modes and media, genres and contexts” (p. 206, emphasis mine). Applying this principle to the practice of composition in US colleges, Jordan argues for an understanding of composing that is not limited to the idea of producing “efficient and conventionally acceptable texts”, but includes a renewed attention on writing interactions as sites of intercultural and linguistic negotiations (2012, p. 87).

If our goal of cosmopolitan citizens is to invite the ‘stranger’ into our world, we need to rediscover the value of negotiation and cultural mediation. In a position paper published in 1998, Olson defines postmodern ethics as “the encounter with the Other” (p. 46). Our interactions with strangers, Olson adds, are often characterized by dissymmetries of power and culture between individuals. How we negotiate our encounter with the Other, he concludes, is a weighty responsibility, and precisely what ethics is about.

ELF research

The language of intercultural exchange is not native English: Emergent speakers use ELF both in spoken and written interactions. ELF is hard to describe because of its fluid and context-dependent nature (Canagarajah, 2007, 2013; Pennycook, 2007; Jenkins, Cogo, & Dewey, 2011; Matsuda & Friedrich, 2011; Hülmbauer & Seidlhofer, 2013; Jenkins, 2015; Kimura & Canagarajah, 2018).

However, studies on pragmatic aspects of ELF have shown that emergent speakers can effectively use strategies to negotiate meaning and achieve mutual understanding: Explicitation through frequent repetition and rephrasing (Cogo & Dewey, 2006; Cogo, 2009; Mauranen, 2012); the use of pre-emption signals that anticipate communication problems (Cogo & Dewey, 2012); the joint construction of utterances; the creative use of idioms and metaphors (Pitzl, 2018), and the strategic use of code-switching (see Cogo & House, 2018). The high rate of success of interactions between emergent speakers is due to attitudes of patience, flexibility, and tolerance developed through frequent contact with people from diverse cultures.

There is a lot to learn from the study of the pragmatics of ELF interactions. Importantly, failure to adjust speech and/or failure to use pragmatic strategies typical of ELF in situations of intercultural contact results in a type of miscommunication that Seidlhofer terms *unilateral idiomaticity* (Seidlhofer, 2002, 2009), which occurs when a speaker uses an idiomatic expression that the interlocutor does not know.

An example of this common type of miscommunication is reported by Seidlhofer (2009, p. 202). What follows is an exchange between a British BBC journalist and a Chinese lawyer:

Journalist: . . . but that makes it a criminal offense, in my book!
Lawyer: eh sorry?
Journalist: well don't you think this is criminally wrong?
Lawyer: eh you mean if it was (secret)—yes

Clearly, the inconsiderate use of the idiomatic expression "in my book" causes problems to the Chinese lawyer who is already challenged by having to explain complex ideas in his/her second language during a live TV show.

The concept of unilateral idiomaticity is connected to Widdowson's distinction between the territorial imperative and the cooperative imperative (1983, 1990). Speakers rely on the territorial imperative when they want to establish or reinforce their affiliation to a specific social group. The cooperative imperative is used when the primary goal is to accommodate interlocutors from diverse lingua-cultural backgrounds. Both communication strategies can be effective in a variety of situations, but it is important to understand when the situation demands a shift in communicative strategy, adjustment, adaptation, or, in one word, accommodation.

Connecting Translingualism and ELF research

According to Kimura and Canagarajah (2018), three major changes in the conceptualization and research orientation of ELF scholarship have brought this field of study closer to the translingual approach. First, native and proficient speakers are now included in the research due to a raising awareness that "any use of English by people across different linguacultural backgrounds should constitute ELF" (p. 300). Second, ELF has gradually moved away from focus on form (especially grammatical features) to focus on pragmatic strategies and, more generally, practice. Third, ELF scholars have gradually come to see ELF as "variable manifestations of multilingualism, rather than a superordinate code" (p. 300). These shifts in research orientation, they conclude, have rendered ELF largely similar to the translingual orientation, itself an emergent theory in writing studies.

Problem
We owe to Helm (2015) a study on the practice and challenges of telecollaboration in Europe. Some of the problems identified are organizational difficulties, lack of time, limited technical support and great uncertainty regarding issues students should address in their exchanges.

When proficient speakers of English collaborate with emergent speakers (often students of English as a second or foreign language), another key problem emerges: The problem of the power imbalance between the first group and the second group of students. Emergent speakers are often implicitly positioned as learners who cannot teach anything to proficient speakers and whose role is to imitate speaking and writing models that are typical of native English. In contrast, proficient speakers are usually implicitly presented as language experts. Emergent speakers will have to listen to them, or read their papers, to imitate them, their pronunciation, their vocabulary, even their style, but also their way of organizing an argument, their writing style.

To achieve the pedagogical goals of telecollaboration -- the development of intercultural communicative competence, *in primis* -- this problem must be addressed. However, in the telecollaboration literature it is difficult to find studies that address this specific question.

Project that I will conduct in spring 2021
I will conduct an international project in the spring semester of 2021. A course offered at Penn State, the Ecology of Global English, will be linked to an English as foreign language course offered at Universita' del Piemonte Orientale.

Our tentative plan is to:

- Prepare students for the telecollaboration by introducing topics in intercultural communication, translingualism, and ELF research.
- Pair up students (8 in the US and 8 in Italy).
- Ask each pair to agree on topics to discuss for three 30-minute Zoom meetings.
- Ask students to prepare for the conversation by listing points to discuss and open-ended questions for project-partners.
- Ask students to record their Zoom meetings.

Finally, we will ask students to write a report on their exchanges with project-partners.

Research Questions
Our goal is to understand whether students will set aside monolingualism and native speaker ideology to understand the importance of adaptation and accommodation in lingua franca communication. Will emergent speakers change attitudes towards language learning and set more realistic goals for themselves? Will they set aside deficit models to become more confident in their ability to use ELF?

Will proficient speakers understand how they need to adjust their use of English to accommodate emergent speakers? We also want to explore and understand how students will use pragmatic strategies that have been described in ELF research.

How we are addressing the problem of power imbalance and asymmetrical relationships between project-partners

As we organized our telecollaboration project, we decided that we would do our best to avoid establishing unequal and asymmetrical relationships and diminish the power position of proficient speakers (Helm, Guth & Farrah, 2012). We will not position idiomatic American English as the language to be used in the exchanges and the reports produced by the students in Italy. We will not present the students in the US as the authoritative language experts whose main role is to coach or tutor the Italian students.

Following Helm, Guth, and Farrah's invitation to avoid positioning emergent speakers solely as language learners (2012, p. 118), we will emphasize their expertise as users of English as a lingua franca (ELF) because we agree with Canagarajh (2007) that speakers of ELF should never be reductively considered as incompetent. They can certainly develop their proficiency further, but this is also true for proficient speakers, who can always develop their speaking and writing skills,and certainly need to understand communication in ELF.

There are not many studies that evaluate whether this approach can help students move away from the ideology of native-speakerism and the deficit models of language competence to embrace communication in ELF as an act of negotiation.

On the ideology of native speakerism and its consequences (Canagarajah, 2007; Cook, 1999, Holliday, 2006; Jenkins, 2006, 2007; Kim, 2011; Kramsch, 1997; Pavlenko, 2003; Pennycook, 2007; Rampton, 1990; Widdowson 1994).

Methodology

Data collection methods: Questionnaire; semi-structured interviews with students; class reflections. We will also ask the students who participate in the telecollaboration project to record their Zoom conversation; these videos will be analyzed.

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Institutional Description

I completed my PhD at North Dakota State University, which is the main hub of the Trans-Atlantic and Pacific Project (TAPP). TAPP is a grassroots organization that promotes cross-cultural collaboration launched in 1999 by Bruce Maylath and Sonia Vandepitte. The TAPP is organized in the following way: Students enrolled in writing classes in the U.S. create texts in English and then send them to students majoring in English and translation in a variety of international universities. All the TAPP instructors present writing and translation as activities that greatly benefit from shared authorship and iterative cycles of feedback and revision. Importantly, translators are invited to take on the role of beta-testers whose function is to assess the clarity, accuracy, and overall usability of the documents created by the technical writers.

During my five years at Penn State Behrend, I have collaborated with seven different universities: Molise University, Salento University, and Bolzano University (Italy); São Paulo State University (Brasil); AFM Krakow University (Poland); Kansai University (Japan); and the Polytechnic University of Catalonia (Spain).

Key Theorists: Four main perspectives

Internationalization at home

Internationalization at home designates curriculum-orientated interventions designed to engage students in activities that develop global understanding and intercultural skills. International and comparative perspectives should be "infused" throughout the teaching, research and service missions of higher education.

Scholars: Beelen, J.; Crowther, P.; Deardroff, D. K. ; De Wit, H.; Hunter, F.; Hudzik, J. K.; Jones, E.; Leask, B. Proctor, D.; Rumbley, L. E.

Virtual exchange and telecollaboration
"Virtual exchange" is an umbrella term that O'Dowd (2018) has recently proposed to use to designate a wide range of collaborative projects that link classes in different countries. The telecollaboration model is a structured type of collaboration usually based on the writing and editing of texts.

Scholars: Belz, J.A.; Dooly, M.; Flammia, M.; Godwin-Jones, R. Guth, S., Helm, F.; Mousten, B.; Maylath, B.; O'Dowd, R.; Rubin, J.; Stärke-Meyerring, D.; St.Amant, K.

Translingualism
Translingual scholars combat English-only ideology, native speaker ideology, and standard language ideology. They believe that all acts of communication involve some efforts to negotiate meaning-making and reconcile the conventional with the deviant across different languages, different modes, and different media. They also believe that educators should shift from pedagogies informed by monolinguist assumptions to pedagogies that emphasize linguistic flexibility and an understanding of difference in language as a resource for communicators.

Scholars: Bou Ayash, N.; Canagarajah, S.; Donahue, C; Holliday, A.; Horner, B.; Kramsch, C.; Lu, M-Z.; Matsuda, P.K.; NeCamp, S.; Royster, J., Trimbur, J.; Milroy, J.; Milroy S.; Olson, G. Pennycook, A.; Tardy, C.; You, X.

English as a lingua franca (ELF) research
ELF is any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option. While some linguists have tried to define ELF according to an identifiable phonological and grammatical system, others understand ELF as intersubjectively constructed in specific contexts of interaction.
Scholars generally converge on the idea that ELF is a language of secondary socialization that allows users to interact with individuals outside their primary social space and speech community. Studies on pragmatic aspects of ELF have consistently shown that emergent speakers can resourcefully develop many different strategies to negotiate meaning and achieve mutual understanding.

Scholars: Canagarajah, A. S.; Cogo, A; Cook, V.; Dewey; Holliday, A.; House, J; Jenkins, J.; Leech, G.; Mauranen, A.; Meierkord, C. ; Seidlhofer, B.

Glossary:
- Internationalization at home
- Virtual exchange
- Telecollaboration
- Collaborative writing
- Translation
- Peer feedback
- English as a lingua franca
- Translingualism
- Cross-cultural pragmatics

- Native-speakerism
- Power imbalance
- Unilateral idiomaticity
- Intercultural sensitivity
- Audience awareness
- Intercultural competence