'The most important interaction I have had since coming to Sussex'

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Introduction

- **What and who**
- **Underlying research questions**:
- -what do students' narratives reveal about their perceptions of ICC?
- -what particular aspects of ICC have featured in these students' cultural journeys?
- -how does ICC as a broad concept relate to academic cultural adjustment?
- -what are the implications for facilitating cultural adaptation and intercultural communicative competence for students in HE contexts?

Research Method/ Analysis

▸ Ulrike Hanna Meinhof (1997) – 'The most important day of my life' = tripartite narrative structure – i) description, ii) complication iii) evaluation

▸ Discourse Analysis – thematic comparisons: explicit reference to language, power, self/others, emotion, agency – analysis of related linguistic features; personal pronoun use, active v passive voice, tense, adjective use…

▸

Recent literature on ICC in HE contexts

Hismanoglu 2011, Wang and Byram 2011, Coles and Swami 2012, Wright and Schartner 2013, Houghton 2014…

- Byram's (1997, 2000) conceptualisation of ICC
- **teaching perspectives** – interface between language & culture
- **linguistic component of ICC** –is it (just) about politeness and formality?
- **barriers** from emic (insider) and etic (outsider) perspectives
- **internal** and **external**
- **adjustment processes -**motivation and opportunity

- But what of …**the role of the 'expert' hosts**?

Data samples

- 3 broad approaches / attitudes emerged:

i) maintenance, ii) replacement iii) negotiation

Negotiation

Maintenance

Replacement
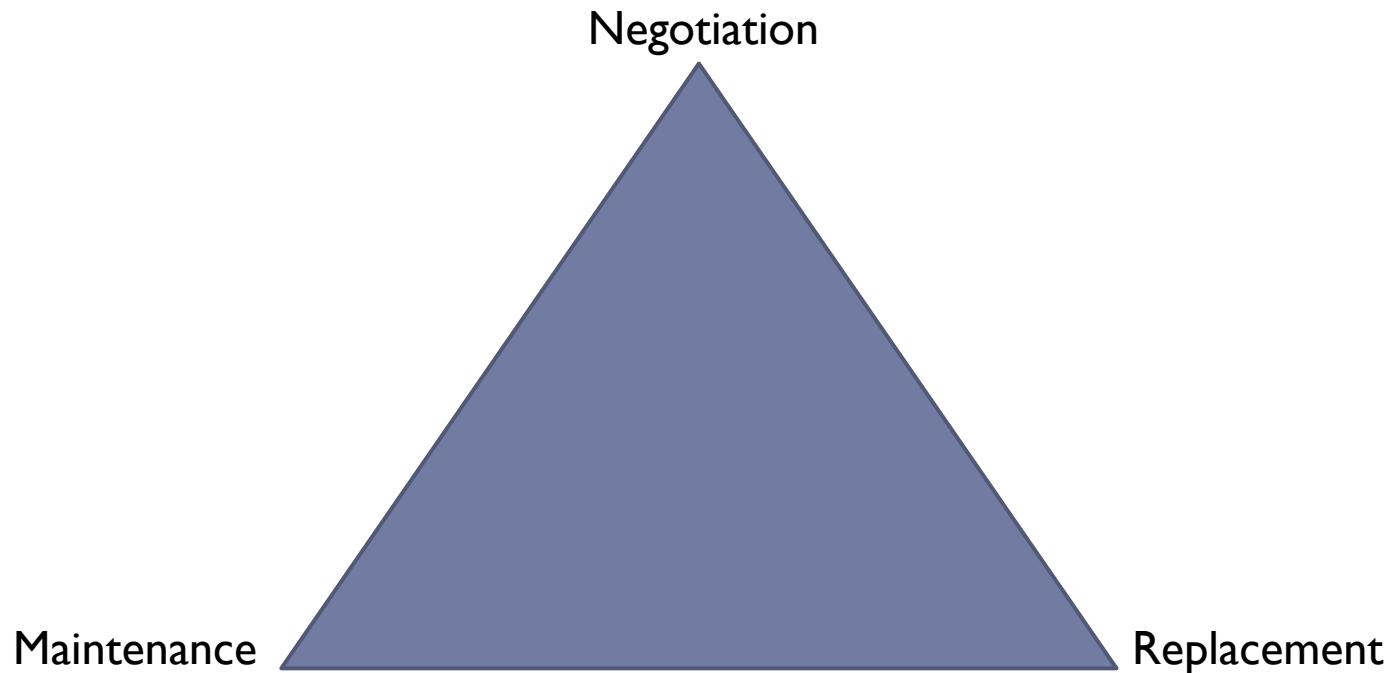
Z: a female PhD student (maintenance)

- *I would like to write about my first day at Sussex. When came here, I did not know anyone in the UK. <u>Maybe more importantly</u>, I came here with terrible English; I think it is still terrible.*

- *Even it was difficult to come from Heathrow to Brighton, I succeeded to reach the Sussex Campus.*

- *Then I went in, there was a man.*

- *Near the bar, near the bar, bar.. bar.. you know, bar…*

- *When I entered my room, I just cried and cried. This was the worst feeling I had ever felt. I just thought I cannot understand English…*

- *I failed to find the place, as if this campus was the biggest in the world.*

- *A Chinese guy helped me.*

- *I could not get any single word of his sentences. I would cry, I wanted him to explain again, but the situation did not change.*

- *This was hard being in a country, if you are not good at talking and understanding the language.*

P: a female PhD student (replacement)

▸ *I really experienced the cultural difference between the Western style of teaching and that of Asia and learned a lot from the process.*

▸ *I was a bit stunned.*

▸ *You don't have your own voice.*

▸ *I should be dare to question and dare to make arguments – and this is something that I have not been taught properly in my original culture.*

▸ *Been criticised honestly, learned from it to voice-out myself and been encouraged directly – this is one of the most unforgettable interactions during my days in the Sussex.*

E: a female PhD student (negotiation)

- *Though I was excited to attend my class I was also a bit nervous.*

- *When I entered the class, I was quite shocked because I was not expecting to be the only international student, but I was.*

- *There were five other students, all English, all graduated from English literature department (plus all men). I was not English, not graduated from English literature department and a woman.*

- *I didn't feel very comfortable and confident. I was rather discomforted and alienated.*

- *I wished that there had been another international student who could have understood me.*

- *Nice, understanding… he was just awesome.*

- *I was just exhausted when I went out of the class. I felt like all my neurons were just running from one part of my brain to another. I couldn't even control or stop them.*

Conclusion

▶ Diversity within our group – the events they describe are fairly similar, but they react and perceive them in surprisingly diverse ways.

▶ How to analyse the actual interaction?

▶ How to coach students in dealing with other people's expectations and inadequacies, as well as your own: interactions are necessarily two-sided.

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