‘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


- 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**?
3 broad approaches / attitudes emerged:
i) maintenance, ii) replacement iii) negotiation
I would like to write about my first day at Sussex. When came here, I did not know anyone in the UK. Maybe more importantly, 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.
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.


