

# ATTITUDES AND IDENTITIES: WHICH FACTORS AFFECT SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATION IN ELF CONTEXTS

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**Abstract** – The study will attempt to explore the relationship between language and culture from a cultural and intercultural perspective, drawing on the concept of linguistic and “cultural flows” (Pennycook 2007) as well as on the idea that culture and language are “nested systems, systems within systems, which mutually co-evolve with each influencing and adapting to the other and with the boundaries between them as fuzzy and blurred” (Baker 2015). The intercultural nature of English will be highlighted in the attempt to identify which factors are more likely to contribute to successful intercultural communication. The study will analyse the attitudes and perceptions of two sample groups. The first sample is composed of students belonging to different first language backgrounds, mainly non-native speakers of English studying in a non-target language environment, the University of Calabria (South of Italy). The second sample is made up of both native and non-native English speakers studying in target-language environments, Chicago Loyola University (USA) and University of Alberta (Canada) where English is not only the main means of communication but also the main medium of academic instruction. An online link to a questionnaire was sent via email to all participants and was used as a research instrument to collect quantitative data. In particular, the study will investigate whether exposure to non-native English and familiarity with multicultural academic communities encourage participants to manifest more or less positive attitudes and awareness towards the relation between culture and language and the factors facilitating or hindering intercultural communication through English. Finally, native/non-native speakers responses will be compared. The purpose will be to shed further light on the factors affecting intercultural communication in ELF contexts, in the hope to gain useful insights that may encourage language teachers to incorporate Intercultural Communication issues in the language classroom. The preliminary results will be presented and pedagogical considerations suggested.

**Keywords:** Intercultural Communication; Language and culture; non-native varieties of English; global English; learners’ attitudes.

## 1. Introduction

The present study will address students’ perceptions towards culture and intercultural communication in the attempt to explore from their perspective the concept of “linguistic and cultural flows” which emerge as a result of adaptation, negotiation and change in intercultural encounters (Pennycook 2007; Risager 2006, 2007). Firstly, a theoretical overview will frame perceptions and attitudes within socio-cultural identities. Secondly, the results of the study will be presented. It is an expansion of a previous study which has analysed the perspective of a group of international students, from different degree courses, studying at the University of Calabria (Italy) (see De Bartolo 2021). This follow-up was carried out about one year later. It was decided to continue and expand the analysis by surveying learners studying in target-language environments, specifically, American and Canadian universities. The purpose in replicating the study was to observe whether results obtained with a larger sample were similar or different to the ones observed with a smaller sample. Moreover, it meant to identify similarities or differences between two different groups, group 1 and group 2, and therefore gain further insights into participants’

attitudes in terms of factors affecting intercultural communication. Finally, the analysis has further investigated differences between native and non-native speakers' responses from the overall group in order to better understand the extent to which native and non-native speakers manifest awareness of what intercultural understanding entails in the diverse, fast-changing and dynamic English speaking world where different cultures and linguistic repertoires contribute to add new flavours to ELF communication and possibly enrich intercultural understanding. Therefore, the analysis will focus on three aspects, the analysis of the overall group, comparison between group 1 and group 2, differences between native and non-native speakers' responses.

## 2. Theoretical background

Student perceptions and attitudes will be explored in relation to socio-cultural factors (Pullen 2012), in particular to cultural identity. Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004, p. 19) define identity as “social, discursive, and narrative options offered by a particular society in a specific time and place to which individuals and groups of individuals appeal in an attempt to self-name, to self-characterize, and to claim social spaces and social prerogatives”. Another definition is provided by Block (2007, p. 27), who defines identities as “socially constructed, self-conscious, ongoing narratives that individuals perform, interpret and project in dress, bodily movements, actions and language”. Bausinger (1999, p. 7) states that “we construct our own identities through categories set by others, and moreover, it is in referring to the outside world that the speaker constitutes himself as a subject. Communication is seen as the relational making of signs, the responsive construction of self, and the interdependence of opposites”. This definition suggests that identity is created through social interaction (see Haslam 2001), “overlapping circles of internalized group memberships. That is, social identity is not one personal self”, rather it develops once the individual relates to the others and therefore perceptions about themselves and others are formed in the process (McCrocklin, Link 2014, p. 137). Social and individual identities are shaped by what language we speak (Bialystok, Hakuta 1994), they are especially called into question when an individual engages with a different language, therefore languages and their related cultures become essential aspects in the way an individual views him or herself as well as the others (Pullen 2012, p. 66). In such a way, individual and social identities intersect with cultural identities. Hall emphasizes two major approaches to cultural identity. The first defines cultural identity as “one, shared culture, ... which people with a shared history and common ancestry hold in common” (Hall 2003, p. 234). In this view, values and beliefs shared by a group of people identify who they are and separate them from those groups who do not share the same. Within this approach, languages reflect specific cultural values and beliefs that correspond to well-defined national cultures. The second approach to cultural identity recognizes that culture is a complex phenomenon that cannot be fully understood. Though specific groups seem to share many cultural elements, there will always be “critical points of deep and significant difference” (Hall 2003, p. 236). Especially in intercultural contexts, cultural identities are not static, rather they are dynamic and flexible, they move between local and global contexts and are constantly contaminated, modified and enriched by a diversity of linguistic and cultural resources (Risager 2006, 2007; Pennycook 2007; Canagarajah 2005, 2007, 2013). Therefore intercultural encounters become “translocal” and “translingual” (Canagarajah 2013, p. 19) as norms of communication transcend conventional linguistic and cultural forms (Mori

2003; Higgins 2007; Young, Sercombe 2010; Zhu 2010, 2011, 2014). This second approach will inform the present study. According to these definitions of cultural identity, identities are linked to culture and language and contribute to shape attitudes, the way an individual views his own culture as well as the others' (Bialystok, Hakuta 1994). Especially within intercultural and plurilingual contexts, cultural identities form perceptions and affect the way we perceive, accept and understand other people's identities. An individual's identity is shaped and developed when that individual engages with other languages and cultures.

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1. Participants and settings**

The present study investigates two groups of participants. Group 1 includes 168 students belonging to different first language backgrounds, mainly non-native speakers of English studying in a non-target language environment, the University of Calabria (Italy) (see De Bartolo 2021). An online link to a questionnaire was sent via email, in the case of Calabria University (Italy), to all international students with the support of the international relations office of the university. The link was emailed along with a letter which explained the objective of the study and the main reasons for involving the students. Contact details of the researcher were provided for any further question, doubt or clarification that was felt necessary from the participants. Among them, 15 stated to be native English speakers, 8 students specified to speak a native variety of English (British/American) and 7 students a non-native (Outer Circle) variety of English, (Kachru 1992; Sharifian 2010; Svartvik, Lech 2006) while the majority, 153 students stated to be non-native speakers of English. The second group is composed of 58 respondents. They were all studying in target-language environments. The questionnaire was administered to participants from the Modern Languages and Literatures department at Chicago Loyola University (U.S.A.) minoring in Italian American Studies, and Social Studies Department at Alberta University (Canada). Out of 58 students who responded, 18 stated to be non-native English speakers and 40 native English speakers (British/American). They were reached through their academic lecturers which had already been contacted and informed about the study. After accepting to support the study, the lecturers were asked to forward the link to their students in class and inform them about the overall objectives. The survey was anonymous so that students may feel more comfortable in giving their responses. The first set of data was collected in the period of January/February 2020, the second set was collected in the period of March/May 2021.

#### **3.2. Research approach and instruments**

To examine students' attitudes, a quantitative design was employed. An online questionnaire was designed and administered to the participants via email. The questionnaire was based on a study by Baker (2015) and adapted from his case study in Thailand. The questionnaire includes three sections. The first section provides general background information which meant to identify whether respondents are native or non-native English speakers and which variety of English they use (Native variety, e.g. British/American English or Non-native variety, e.g. Indian, Singapore, Caribbean,

African, Malaysian, etc.). If they specified to be non-native speakers of English, they were asked to write down how long they have studied English for.

The second section of the questionnaire consists of 9 items aimed at investigating students' awareness of the relation between language and culture. They were encouraged to reflect on the role of culture on communication and the extent to which understanding different cultures impacts on successful intercultural communication.

A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree, was used to express participants' beliefs about the 9 statements below.

1. Culture and language are closely linked.
2. Language is culture.
3. A language represents a specific culture with its world views, values and beliefs.
4. The English language is linked to English culture only.
5. Cultures and specific languages can be separated (for example, the English language can be separated from British culture).
6. In multicultural settings, negotiation strategies (confirmation checks, clarification requests, paraphrasing, repetitions, code-mixing and so on), contribute to achieving effective communication in English.
7. English used in multicultural settings enables speakers to share their different cultures.
8. In order to communicate effectively, it is important to understand the influence of culture on communication.
9. In order to communicate effectively, it is necessary to know the culture of the people you are communicating with.

The third and final section of the survey includes 6 items which specifically address the factors that may facilitate successful intercultural communication. Respondents recorded their answers on a scale from 1 to 5 as above.

10. Knowing about the way other non-native English speakers use English.
11. Knowing about the culture of the non-native English speakers you are communicating with.
12. Knowing about the culture of native English speaking countries.
13. Having a native-like pronunciation.
14. Using correct native-like grammar.
15. Knowing about the relationship between language and culture.

### **3.3. Research design**

American and Canadian universities are known to be multicultural environments where a number of academic staff are non-native speakers of English (Jenkins 2015). University classes therefore provide students with the opportunity to get in contact with people from other countries and experience non-native English (MacCrocklin *et al.* 2018, p. 141). Studies suggest that there is a positive correlation between students' attitudes towards non-native English speech and their familiarity to it, in other words, students who had contacts with non-native Englishes are more likely to form positive perceptions of the speakers as well as to show greater comprehension. Therefore, exposure seems to produce higher acceptance and tolerance to non-native varieties of English (Kang, Rubin 2009). It would be interesting to explore in detail if prior exposure to non-native speech may result in positive reactions in "naturally occurring interaction" (Cogo, Dewey 2012), which means communicative contexts where English is the main means of communication between speakers from different language and cultural backgrounds.

In the data analysis section, firstly, attitudes and beliefs will be analysed in the

whole sample. Secondly, participants' attitudes will be examined and compared between the two different groups. The purpose of this part of the study will be to investigate whether higher exposure to non-native varieties of English and more direct involvement in multicultural academic communities where English is the main means of communication and the main medium of academic instruction leads participants to manifest more or less positive attitudes towards the relation between culture and language and the factors facilitating or hindering intercultural communication. The hypothesis is that the second group of students is likely to be more exposed to multicultural contexts and non-native English as compared to the first, therefore, they may be more willing to accommodate intercultural misunderstandings and consequently more aware of the issues affecting successful intercultural communication. Finally, the different perceptions between native and non-native speakers of English will be explored and mean scores compared through a two tailed normal distribution Z, with the purpose to identify statistically significant differences in the participants' responses. Before analysing and interpreting the data, the limitations of the study must be identified. The analysis and findings do not aim to be comprehensive or to draw any definitive conclusions at the present stage. The analysis of the findings is tentative, having relied on statistical procedures exclusively and therefore needs to be corroborated by a qualitative methodology which will be able to explore and clarify issues that so far have not been fully grasped. Moreover, the paper does not mean to suggest that intercultural communication through ELF is a unique form of intercultural communication (House 2009; Firth 2009) or that it occurs more often than all other forms of intercultural communication. However, as Baker (2015, p. 33) points out, the global spread of English is an unprecedented phenomenon and is increasingly being used in the majority of communicative contexts where people from different first language backgrounds interact, therefore, it is more likely that intercultural communication occurs through English as a lingua franca compared to any other language used as a lingua franca.

### **3.4. Data analysis and discussion**

#### **3.4.1. Part 1 Analysis of the overall sample**

Data analysis of the questionnaire was conducted by using SPSS version 26 and included descriptive statistics, tabulations of responses, percentages and mean scores. Table 1 and graph 1 below show the mean scores calculated on the overall sample, 226 participants.

From the data collected (see Table 1 and Figure 1), it emerges that respondents manifest awareness of the close relation between culture and language. Question 1 *Culture and language are closely linked* and question 2 *Language is culture* show mean scores respectively of 4.10 and 4.05. Similarly, question 8 *In order to communicate effectively it is important to know the influence of culture on communication* (mean score 3.97), highlights the important role culture plays on successful intercultural communication. Moreover, responses suggest that according to the participants surveyed, the use of English in multicultural settings, and therefore exposure to ELF communication, enables participants to share their different cultures as *question 7* suggests with a mean score of 4.04. On a similar scale, *question 6* (mean score of 3.85) reinforces the idea that *In multicultural settings, negotiating strategies (confirmation checks, clarification requests, paraphrasing, repetitions, code-mixing and so on)*, contribute to achieve effective communication in English. This emphasises that when sharing their different linguistic repertoires, participants cooperate to dynamically achieve a mutual goal which is successful understanding despite the use of non-native English. When surveyed about

which factors facilitate intercultural communication, question 10, *Knowing about the way other non-native English speakers use English* (mean score 3.72) and question 11, *Knowing about the culture of the non-native English speakers you are communicating with* (mean score 3.76) highlight that knowing and sharing different cultures and different forms of English in intercultural communicative settings is likely to enhance successful interaction. This may suggest that participants are aware that English has increasingly diversified on a global scale to fit different forms, function and cultural purposes, and that language, culture and intercultural communication are strongly linked. Finally, it is interesting to observe that the question who got the lowest mean score (2.09) is question 4, *The English language is linked to English culture only*, which draws attention to the fact that English has crossed geographical borders and has incorporated a variety of cultural elements that cannot be restricted to national cultures.

From the first part of the analysis, it can be concluded that the results obtained from the whole sample seem to overall support results obtained from the first set of data in the previous study as far as learners' attitudes are concerned (see De Bartolo 2021). Mean scores calculated in the first study are mostly replicated in the larger group. Results do not seem to differ among the two sets of data.

Variables	Means
Q1	4,10
Q2	4,05
Q3	3,80
Q4	2,09
Q5	3,20
Q6	3,85
Q7	4,04
Q8	3,97
Q9	3,79
Q10	3,72
Q11	3,76
Q12	3,65
Q13	3,32
Q14	3,64
Q15	3,84

Table 1  
Means calculated on the overall sample (226 participants).

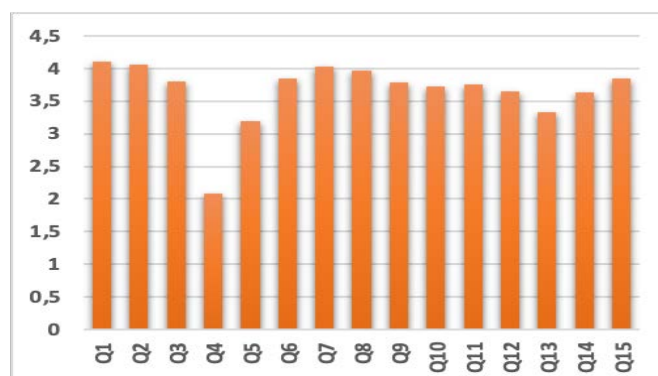


Figure 1  
Distribution of mean scores in the overall sample.

### 3.4.2. Part 2 Comparison between group 1 and 2

The second part of the analysis means to compare mean scores between the two groups. The first sample is composed of international students who use English as a lingua franca, yet in a non-target language environment, in other words, an Italian university context where Italian is the only medium of academic instruction. On the other hand, the second group presents learners who are immersed in target language environments, Canadian and American universities, where English is the main medium of academic instruction as well as the main vehicle of intercultural communication. The objective was to identify similarities or differences between learners' responses in terms of attitudes. As it is known from statistical theory, the probability table associated with the normal distribution allows us to carry out a hypothesis test on the differences between means having as object the means of two populations. The requirement to be satisfied is that the sum of the two sample sizes is large enough, preferably greater than 100. In our case, being this condition satisfied, to test the null hypothesis a two tailed normal distribution Z was applied ( $H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2$ , versus  $H_1: \mu_1 \neq \mu_2$ ,  $\alpha = 0,05$ ,  $Z_{\alpha/2} = \pm 1,96$ ) (Bohrnstedt, Knoke 1994) and statistically significant differences observed, as table 3 shows. Therefore, when we have values higher than +1,96 or lower than -1,96 we reject the null hypothesis, meaning that the differences between means are statistically significant. In all other cases, we accept the null hypothesis. From a first analysis (Table 2), it emerges that mean scores are higher in the second sample group especially when surveyed about the factors which facilitate intercultural communication.

As shown in Tables 2, 3, and Figure 2 below, questions 10 and 11 (*Knowing about the way other non-native English speakers use English* and *Knowing about the culture of the non-native English speakers you are communicating with*) present higher mean scores in the second group (4.16 and 4.16) compared to the first group (mean scores 3.57 and 3.62). In these cases statistically significant differences are revealed from the analysis as shown in table 3. Moreover, questions 8, *In order to communicate effectively it is important to know the influence of culture on communication* and question 9, *In order to communicate effectively it is necessary to know the culture of the people you are communicating with*, both present higher means in group 2 (4.12; 4.12) compared to group 1 (3.92; 3.68). In question 9, a statistically significant difference is observed. These results highlight the participants' positive attitudes when engaging with their interlocutors' different cultures and the crucial role culture plays in communication. This idea is reinforced in question 1, *Culture and language are closely linked*, with mean scores of 3.99 (group 1) and 4.41 (group 2) which also reveal a statistically significant difference as shown in table 3 below. In general terms, respondents from group 2 seem to show higher acceptance of the way non-native speakers use English in interaction which is likely to be considered an important factor to achieve communication.

When surveyed about the relation between culture and language we observe the following results. Question 3, *A language represents a specific culture with its world views, values and beliefs*, presents, on the contrary, higher mean scores in group 1 (3.86) compared to group 2 (3.64). Although the question does not reveal statistically significant differences, it may suggest that students living in a non-target language environment, who have less opportunities to experience real ELF communicative contexts are more likely to view languages as attached to specific national cultures which reflect those values and beliefs. The idea of languages as crossing borders and transcending well-defined cultures may be something they are not aware of, while empirical studies have largely highlighted that English as a lingua franca is "hybrid" and "de-territorialized"; ELF transcends

national borders and draws on cultural flows and multiple linguistic resources that are modified and recreated during interaction (Canagarajah 2005, 2007, 2013; Risager 2006, 2007; Pennycook 2007). On the other hand, participants from group 1 seem to be more aware that negotiating strategies (code-mixing, clarification requests, comprehension checks, paraphrasing and so on) used to achieve mutual understanding are helpful to negotiate meaning in intercultural interaction (question 6) and that English used in multicultural settings enables speakers to share their different cultures (question 7). In question 7 a significant difference is revealed from the analysis.

Significant differences are also observed in question 14, *Using correct native like grammar*, which presents slightly higher mean scores in the first group (3.73) compared to the second (3.36). Question 13, *Having a native-like pronunciation*, also reveals slightly higher scores in the first group (3.38) compared to the second (3.16), though no statistical significance is revealed in this last question. The data may suggest that for students who are more familiar with interculturally-oriented environments, the use of standard British/American grammar or native pronunciation is not considered a relevant factor in facilitating intercultural communication. Moreover, the idea that the English language is linked to English culture only as in question 4, again presents slightly higher mean scores in group 1 (2.22) as compared to group 2 (1.71) with a higher level of disagreement in group 2. In this particular question a statistically significant difference is observed. This result seems to support the previous view that a higher exposure for learners to non-standard English in intercultural and multicultural settings may lead to a greater awareness of the diversity of English as well as of its wider connections with a variety of geographical and cultural settings which transcend the British borders. In overall terms, the data seem to support the hypothesis that the second group of participants, being more exposed to multicultural communicative contexts where English is used in different non-native varieties and for different communicative purposes, show more awareness of the impact culture has on achieving intercultural communication and understanding.

Variables	Group 1	Group 2
Q1	3,99	4,41
Q2	4,06	4,03
Q3	3,86	3,64
Q4	2,22	1,71
Q5	3,14	3,38
Q6	3,92	3,64
Q7	4,19	3,60
Q8	3,92	4,12
Q9	3,68	4,12
Q10	3,57	4,16
Q11	3,62	4,16
Q12	3,61	3,76
Q13	3,38	3,16
Q14	3,73	3,36
Q15	3,79	3,98

Table 2

Means calculated for the fifteen variables in the two groups.



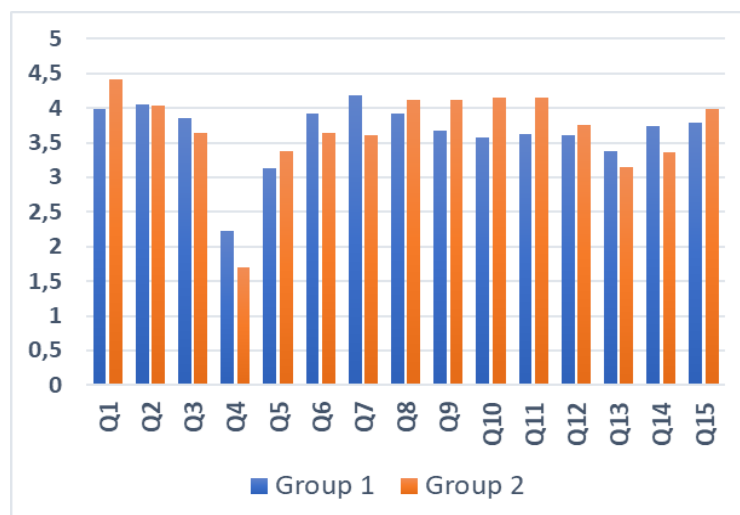


Figure 2  
Distribution of mean scores in the two groups.

Group 1 N=168	Group 2 N=58	For $\alpha=0,05$ , $Z_{\alpha/2}=\pm 1,96$	
Q1	Q1	-3,2393	Reject $H_0$
Q2	Q2	0,1574	Accept $H_0$
Q3	Q3	1,3152	Accept $H_0$
Q4	Q4	3,5568	Reject $H_0$
Q5	Q5	-1,3742	Accept $H_0$
Q6	Q6	1,9515	Accept $H_0$
Q7	Q7	4,2175	Reject $H_0$
Q8	Q8	-1,3832	Accept $H_0$
Q9	Q9	-2,7058	Reject $H_0$
Q10	Q10	-4,7191	Reject $H_0$
Q11	Q11	-3,8658	Reject $H_0$
Q12	Q12	-0,9205	Accept $H_0$
Q13	Q13	1,3806	Accept $H_0$
Q14	Q14	2,2866	Reject $H_0$
Q15	Q15	-1,4084	Accept $H_0$

Table 3  
A two tailed normal distribution Z calculated for fifteen corresponding variables in the two groups.

### 3.4.3. Part 3 Comparison between native and non-native speakers' beliefs

Furthermore, the analysis has meant to compare mean scores between native and non-native speakers' responses calculated on the overall sample. Out of 226 participants, 171 stated to be non-native English speakers and 55 native English speakers. Table 4 below shows the descriptive statistics calculated for the two groups (natives and non-natives). Table 5 shows the results of the test on the differences between means in native and non-native speakers' responses through a two tailed normal distribution Z at  $\alpha=0,05$  level of significance ( $Z_{\alpha/2}=\pm 1,96$ ). Therefore, values higher than +1,96 indicate that native speakers have on average answered significantly more favourably, values lower than -1,96 indicate that non-native speakers have on average answered significantly more positively. In all other cases we accept the null hypothesis, in those cases we can say that there are no significant differences between the means in the two groups.

Variables	Natives = 55			Non Natives = 171		
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance
Q1	4,35	0,70	0,49	4,02	1,02	1,05
Q2	3,96	1,00	1,00	4,08	1,02	1,04
Q3	3,55	0,98	0,96	3,88	1,02	1,03
Q4	1,87	0,98	0,96	2,16	1,11	1,24
Q5	3,35	1,19	1,42	3,15	1,27	1,62
Q6	3,75	0,84	0,71	3,88	0,88	0,77
Q7	3,75	0,80	0,64	4,13	0,89	0,78
Q8	4,05	0,83	0,68	3,94	1,00	1,00
Q9	3,98	1,06	1,13	3,73	1,04	1,08
Q10	3,98	0,87	0,76	3,64	0,88	0,77
Q11	4,15	0,76	0,57	3,63	0,95	0,90
Q12	3,67	0,92	0,85	3,64	0,96	0,92
Q13	3,33	0,94	0,89	3,32	1,12	1,25
Q14	3,51	1,02	1,03	3,68	1,03	1,05
Q15	3,84	0,88	0,77	3,84	0,95	0,91

Table 4  
Descriptive statistics calculated for native and non-native speakers' responses.

Sample groups: Natives N=55; Non-natives N=171	for $\alpha=0,05$ , $Z_{\alpha/2}=\pm 1,96$	
Q1	2,63	Reject $H_0$
Q2	-0,76	Accept $H_0$
Q3	-2,21	Reject $H_0$
Q4	-1,81	Accept $H_0$
Q5	1,03	Accept $H_0$
Q6	-1,04	Accept $H_0$
Q7	-3,01	Reject $H_0$
Q8	0,84	Accept $H_0$
Q9	1,53	Accept $H_0$
Q10	2,54	Reject $H_0$
Q11	4,10	Reject $H_0$
Q12	0,20	Accept $H_0$
Q13	0,04	Accept $H_0$
Q14	-1,07	Accept $H_0$
Q15	-0,04	Accept $H_0$

Table 5  
A two tailed normal distribution Z calculated for fifteen variables in natives and non-natives.

By analysing the data we may suggest that native speakers of English manifest more positive attitudes compared to non-native speakers when surveyed about the factors which affect successful intercultural communication. Question 10, *Knowing about the way other non-native English speakers use English* and question 11 *Knowing about the culture of the non-native English speakers you are communicating with* show mean scores of 3.98 and 4.15 in native speakers' responses compared to non-natives' responses, 3.64 and 3.63

respectively. Statistically significant differences are observed in these questions. These results may suggest that the native speakers surveyed, being directly immersed in multicultural settings, are likely to recognise that English has spread in many different contexts and has diversified in a variety of local and non-native forms which are very much used in intercultural settings where speakers from different language and cultural backgrounds use English to communicate. Moreover a significant difference is also revealed in question 1, *Culture and language are closely linked*, which shows a higher mean score for natives (4.35) compared to non-natives (4.02). On the contrary, higher mean scores are observed for non-natives in question 3, *A language represents a specific culture with its world views, values and beliefs*, and in question 7, *English used in multicultural settings enables speakers to share their different cultures*, where significant differences are identified. The result from question 3, may suggest, as already pointed out earlier, that non-native speakers of English may identify a closer connection between national cultures and languages, while native speakers may be more aware of the fact that languages and cultures are not limited to geographical and cultural borders. If we consider the group of native speakers surveyed, they are likely to be more exposed to different cultures and to different forms of English which do not conform to well-defined standard norms. Risager (2006, 2007) criticizes those approaches which identify a close connection between culture and language on the basis of nationalisms. Though culture and language are closely linked, as human language is always embedded in culture (Risager 2007, p. 12), a particular language is not necessarily linked to a particular culture. She argues that cultures and languages can be separated. As research into Global Englishes and ELF have shown, there is a huge variety in the way English is used and the “cultural scripts” through which English linguistic forms operate.

Results from question 7, on the other hand, also present a higher mean score for non-natives (4.13) respect to natives (3.75) with a significant difference observed. This may suggest that the non-native speakers surveyed are aware, generally speaking, that when using ELF participants from different linguistic backgrounds cooperate to reach a common goal which is communicate effectively and by doing so they are likely to better share and understand their own and other peoples’ cultures. No other significant differences are revealed from the analysis.

## 4. Conclusions

It can be concluded that the second group of participants, the one living and studying in an ELF context, seems to best acknowledge that engaging with non-native English cultures and speech enrich intercultural communication. On the other hand, group 1 seems to be more aware that the use of negotiation strategies facilitates intercultural communication and enables speakers to share their different cultures. However, they seem to prioritize native speaker pronunciation and correct native-like grammar as important elements to achieve effective communication. Furthermore, participants from group 1 don’t seem to be fully aware that English transcends and crosses national borders and is not limited to geographical and cultural boundaries. It is interesting to point out that the native speakers surveyed, compared to the non-native speakers from the overall sample, manifest wider understanding and awareness of the diversity of English, of the need to embrace the culture and the language of non-native English speakers when intercultural communication occurs. The study aimed to compare groups across different cultural and language backgrounds with the purpose to shed more light into learners’ attitudes towards

the factors which facilitate intercultural communication and the crucial role culture plays on successful understanding and communication in ELF contexts. Though results cannot be generalized and need to be corroborated with a mixed-method approach that would possibly clarify issues that so far were not explored, the preliminary results reveal a positive correlation between learners' exposure to ELF environments and higher acceptance and awareness of the diversity of English and of the need to engage with different cultures to enhance intercultural communication and knowledge.

## 5. Pedagogical considerations

Classroom teaching can play a crucial role in raising awareness that learning English means being exposed to one tongue with many different voices which contribute to enhance their unique cultural identities, expand linguistic repertoires, and enrich the perspective through which we look at each other and actively work together for mutual understanding. Learners need to develop those intercultural skills necessary to achieve a wider level of communication which crosses and transcends linguistic boundaries and closely intertwines language and culture in ELF communication. For instance, empirical data (Seidlhofer, Widdowson 2009; Jenkins *et al.* 2011) have revealed that participants, in a number of contexts such as business or institutional settings (Pitzl 2010; Cogo 2016), negotiate meaning and mutually cooperate to prevent miscommunication and achieve communicative goals through a number of communicative strategies. These strategies include repetition, confirmation checks, clarification requests, restatements, understanding checks, self-repair, turn-taking, simultaneous speech, utterance completions, code-switching, creative use of shared resources, such as idioms, translanguaging, pre-realizations, post-trouble source strategies (Cogo, Dewey 2006, 2012; Pullin Stack 2009; Kaur 2011; Wolfartsberger 2011; Hulmbauer 2009; Pitzl 2010, 2012).

Incorporating intercultural communication in the language classroom is firstly an awareness-raising process, a demanding, transformative process which touches teachers' deeper convictions about standard language, as well as their own role as custodians of "proper English" for their learners (Sifakis 2014, p. 133).

If mutual intelligibility among non-native speakers is the key to successful intercultural communication, as ELF studies have shown (Firth 1996; Jenkins 2006; Reed 2012; Seidlhofer 2004), then teachers should look at examples of successful communication around the world where English is used, and consequently develop teaching and learning contexts where such instances can be replicated in the language classroom. It is also important that teachers are exposed to "successful NNS-NNS discourse and become aware of the underlying social, psychological and cognitive accommodation mechanisms at play" (Sifakis 2014, p. 133). Integrating intercultural communication and ELF-related aspects in the syllabus requires teachers to go beyond the traditional belief that English is a language shaped and owned by its native speakers. On the contrary, it is necessary to adopt a transformative and challenging approach that allows to see English as a form of communication that takes different shapes depending on the interlocutors (Sifakis 2014, p. 135). Teachers should therefore realise that there is so much more attached to language: "social relations, cultural models, power and politics, perspectives on experience, values and attitudes, as well as things and places in the world" (Gee 2008, p. 1). If teachers come to terms with this approach, modify their existing beliefs, adapting them to fit specific contexts, the results will reflect on their learners who will become owners of the linguistic tools offered them, and grow as confident users of

English in any encounters they may have with both native and non-native interlocutors.

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