

HEGEMONIES IN TELECOLLABORATION

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some definitions

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□ Telecollaboration

- ▣ Internet-based intercultural exchange between students with different cultural/national backgrounds organized in institutional contexts with two main objectives to develop:
 - language skills
 - intercultural **communicative** competence

□ Hegemonies

- ▣ The process by which a dominant culture maintains its dominant position using technology, politics, commerce, etc.

hegemonies in telecollaboration

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The process by which a dominant **culture**, wittingly or unwittingly, maintains its dominant position using...

language

technology

educational models

language & hegemony

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- *Cultura and E-Tandem*
 - bi-lingual, bi-national, bi-cultural models
 - concept of reciprocity, equal time for both languages
 - learn about and discuss the target cultures
 - culture considered to be static and nation-based

- new models (e.g. Soliya)
 - mono and/or plurilingual/national/cultural models
 - concept of reciprocity in terms of content, not language
 - learn about individual cultures and discuss global issues
 - culture considered to be fluid and individual

English as ...

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- a native language
 - a foreign language
 - an international language
- global power & hegemony
-
- varieties of World Englishes
- local ownership
-
- a lingua franca
- community ownership

as a compulsory foreign language

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For example, in Sri Lanka (*Canagarajah, 1999*)

“The question confronting the students is not whether English *should* be learned, but *how*.

They will neither refuse to learn English nor acquire it unconditionally in the terms dictated by the [hegemonic power].

They will appropriate the language in their own terms, according to their needs, values, and aspirations.”

case in point

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2007 - English Language Resource Centre (ELRC), Al-Azhar University, Egypt

Professor in 2007:

- "[..] we view this American centre as a gradual cultural occupation which will eventually lead to American hegemony over Al-Azhar curricula." (Rehab Sayed Ahmed)

Student in 2010:

- "I am not totally convinced that the American government can promote American culture through ELRC [...] I see ELRC as a way for delivering a message and correcting the bad image of the Islamic Religion not just knowing a new culture." (Eid)

as a lingua franca

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communication between non-native speakers –
may include native speakers as well, but are they
necessarily at an advantage?

**native speakers with limited
experience speaking to non-
native speakers**

**native speakers who are
monolingual**

vs

**non-native speakers with experience
in multicultural societies/nations or
through travel**

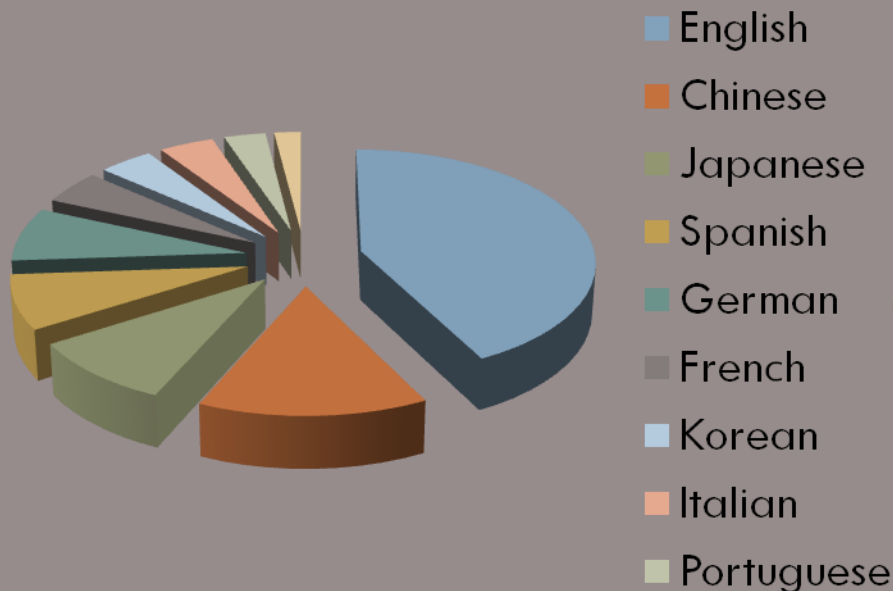
**non-native speakers who are
bilingual or plurilingual**

language on the Web

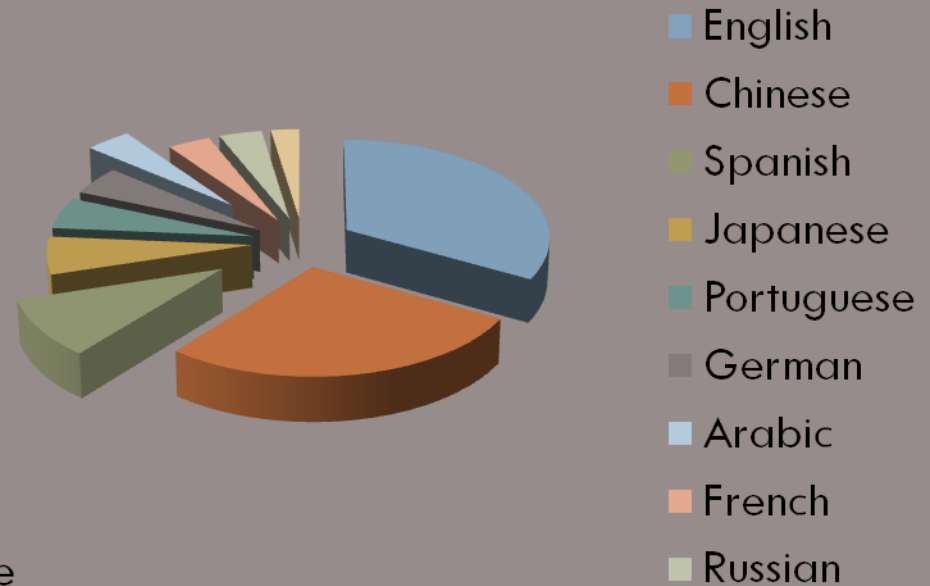
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For over a decade English dominated the Web and associated with the global diffusion of 'Western' values and behaviours as cultural and linguistic diversity were subsumed by the 'global village'

2004



2010



Internet access

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Geography, class, status

- globally use is greater among wealthier, well-educated members of societies
- globally use is limited in more rural areas

Politics

- limited government intervention to promote access
- censorship
- governmental control of access

educational technology & hegemonies

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Anglophone educational institutions are using online learning, wittingly or unwittingly, to export their 'universal' educational models, values and beliefs

“[It is time to start] overcoming the prevailing and stubborn ethnocentric belief that the technologies, pedagogies and instructional design techniques of one’s own culture are somehow ‘universal’. As an increasing number of researchers are starting to make very clear, such an assumption is simply naive and inevitably fatal to efforts to exploit ICTs for effective cross-cultural communication” (Ess, 2009, p. 27)

The design of online environments and interactions reflect cultural dimensions and have “a strong bearing on the way that activity in the environment comes to be understood” (Goodfellow and Hewling, 2005, p. 364).

an example – Blackboard

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Assignment Dropbox?

Grade Book?

Grading Forms?

Discussions?

Who are these terms familiar to?

Who 'owns' student-produced content?

Who 'controls' the environment?

Teacher collaboration?

but...

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- learning environments and social practices can be transformed from within, and dynamics of power and established practices can be challenged and overturned as the new online culture of the group is negotiated and new forms are developed

Soliya Connect Program

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dealing with hegemonies

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- two facilitators fluent in English, one in Arabic
- balance of students from the West & from predominantly-Muslim culture
 - = minority of native US speakers in each group
- audio/video chat + group/private text chat
- the interface has students organized in a circular format
- the *Connect Program* environment is run by Soliya, not any of the participating organizations

Research findings (Spring 2010)

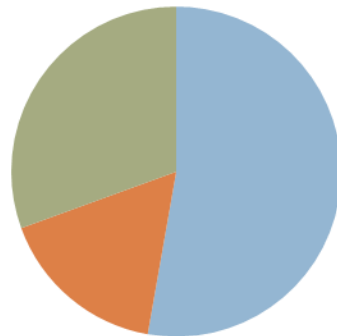
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Quantitative data:

pre- and post-survey results

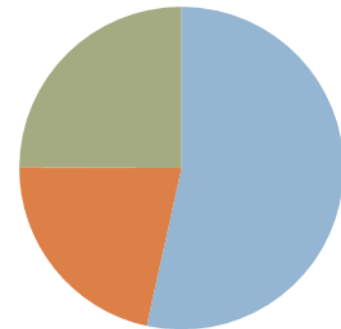
N=217 sts

Universities



- Group A
- Group E
- Group U

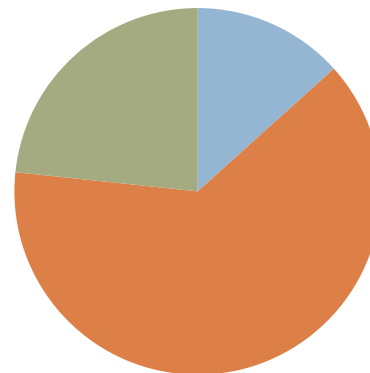
No. of sts



Students in Hebron, Jordan and Padova

Qualitative data:

N=30 sts



- Hebron
- Jordan
- Padova

language

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- only 5 out of 30 report the importance of language learning: students placed more importance on the dialogue process and meaning-making rather than on simply “speaking in English”.
- Hebron and Jordan:
 - ▣ *“how to express my opinions bravely”* (J03)
 - ▣ *“it gave me a chance to talk freely about different issues”* (J08).

language & technology

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- initially lack of self-confidence: hesitant and concerned about how to start a conversation, how to participate, what to say.
- unfamiliar with the Soliya environment and moderated audio-video discussion:

foreign language + new technology =
heavy cognitive load & anxiety

solution =
orientation sessions, facilitator intervention
& local teacher guidance

hegemonies (1)

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- **'weaker' groups:** less confident, need encouragement to speak and tend to seek support from facilitators.
- **'advantaged' groups:** more confident and talkative, have a greater tendency to challenge the agenda proposed by the facilitator and to challenge the facilitator's authority.

- ▣ *Facilitators helped us to feel very comfortable in this project, especially in the beginnings session when we were very disorientated in this new project. Then they helped us when we had technical project, resuming the discussion when we disconnected. (PD)*
- ▣ *Our facilitators did not foster provocative, engaging discussion. They tried so hard not to step on toes that the discussion just didn't get anywhere. (US)*

hegemonies (2)

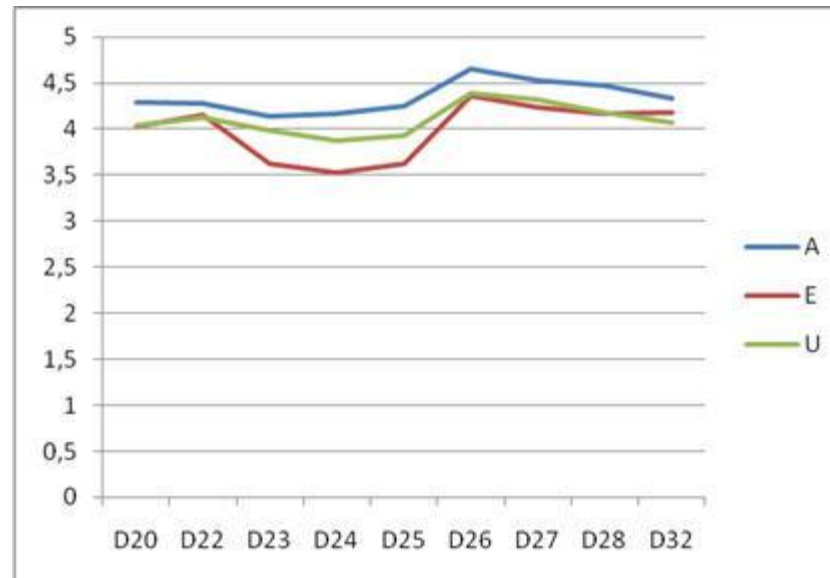
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- In the literature on power asymmetries **dominant groups** tend to minimize inter-group difference and emphasize common humanity and building friendships
 - ▣ *One of the most important things I've learnt is that we should not dismiss differences by assuming that in the end we're all the same. Instead, cultural and social differences do exist and shape our lives: what we should really do is to be willing to get to know them, trying to appreciate other people's perspectives, so as to respect them without fear or prejudice. (PD)*
 - ▣ *"I learned to respect people's opinions more, in addition to having a good idea about other cultures and countries."(J)*
 - ▣ *"We really all are the same, maybe different beliefs and customs, but we do all want the same things" (US)*

overall evaluation

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- extremely positive: above 4 on a scale of 5



- The **'advantaged'** group appreciates the experience, but is more inclined to criticize it with respect to the other groups.

comments

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- Grouping students into broad geographical regions is limiting, e.g.
 - ▣ *As an European I find, however, that the American and the European cultures, despite sharing many values and traditions, are in many ways different, so that it's hard to talk of common identities in both continents. (Padova)*
 - ▣ Students in Jordan have much better Internet access than students in Palestine.
 - ▣ Students who attend English-medium universities are at a linguistic advantage to their non-native speaker peers.

to conclude...

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“the necessary way of connection of different cultures is not a video, a website, a computer, but people who decide to involve themselves in the program. The other elements are only instruments to reach the aim (intercultural dialogue).” (Padova)

Thank you

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