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Academics across borders: narratives of linguistic capital, language competence and communication strategies

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This article reports on a study that examined the personal employment paths of six international academics at a British university. To complement previous accounts of difficult migration, it focuses on the successful experiences of such academics, in particular how proficiency in English facilitated their move into employment in higher education (HE), and the linguistic competences and communication strategies they deploy in their daily activities. The article identifies key factors that have facilitated to their academic achievements and contributes to the understanding of the benefits and consequences of skilled migration. In conclusion, it suggests workplace pedagogy and policy responses that could facilitate other international academics' successful experiences in the UK HE sector.

Keywords: skilled migration; English as an international language; linguistic competences; communication strategies; workplace pedagogy and policy

Introduction

The Higher Education Funding Council for England 2012 report on staff in higher education (HE) institutions revealed that 'in 2010-11, one in four academics had a non-UK nationality' (4). These statistics show a growing trend in staff recruitment in British HE and the growing role of an international academic labour market in the internationalisation of HE (Hsieh 2012; Jiang et al. 2010; Kim and Brooks 2012). As internationalisation occupies a more central position in the mission and vision of many British universities, the number of international academics is likely to rise, particularly in the sciences, engineering and the social sciences (Universities UK 2007). As previous studies have acknowledged (e.g., Alfred 2010; Kim 2009; OECD 2008; Sastry 2005; She and Wotherspoon 2013; Smetherhama, Fentonb, and Modood 2010; Universities UK 2007), skilled migration is a critical resource for a knowledge-driven economy.

A missing dimension in many studies of skilled migration is the role of language as a constitutive element in the construction and dissemination

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of knowledge, values and ideologies. In the same way that globalisation and language contact have been conceptualised separately (Collins, Slembrouck, and Baynham 2009), the relationship between skilled migration and language skills has remained under-researched. The migration studies that have considered language (e.g., Chiswick and Miller 2007; Hardoy and Schøne 2012; Kim 2009; Reitz 2007) have given rather superficial accounts of its role in skilled migration while the linguistic investigations of migration (e.g., Kling and Stæhr 2011) have neglected related factors such as identity and agency. With a few notable exceptions (e.g., Adsera and Pytlikova 2010; Canagarajah 2013), research on skilled migration has thus shown a tendency to conceptualise skilled migration and language, especially English as an international language, in a discrete fashion. Besides anecdotal evidence, we still know relatively little about the role that proficiency in English plays in the professional development of international academics, about the linguistic competences required to perform successfully in higher education institutions (HEIs) or about the effective communication strategies that international academics adopt for their daily professional work.

Here we report on a study that used the narrated lived experiences of a group of six international academics in three faculties (science, social sciences and engineering) at a British university to examine their trajectories into HE in Britain. In line with previous research on the personal experience of multilingual academics (e.g., Canagarajah 2004; Giampapa 2004; Lillis and Curry 2010; Pavlenko 2006), narratives were chosen as they offer researchers opportunities for a 'systematic study of personal experiences and meaning' (Reissman 1993, 78). Narrative networks (Gimenez 2010) were used as a method of data collection and analysis as they facilitate placing personal experience within broader institutional and social contexts.

In an attempt to complement previous accounts of difficult migration (e.g., Blommaert 2009; Solis 2004), the article focuses on the successful experiences of these academics; in particular, how proficiency in English has supported their careers in HE; the linguistic competences they needed for successful socialisation into their schools and departments and the strategies they deploy for effective communication with colleagues and students. Within these three dimensions, the article identifies key factors that have contributed to their academic achievements and success in an attempt to advance our understanding of the benefits and consequences of skilled migration and suggests workplace pedagogy and policy responses that could facilitate other international academics' successful experiences in the UK HE sector.

Success, however, may be a rather slippery and very personal concept. Different people would have different ideas about what constitutes success and apply different criteria for measuring it, which may be determined by the stage of their professional careers. For Bart,[1] one of the participating lecturers, 'being appointed was already a sign of success', whereas for Xue, one of the

associate professors in the study, success meant having 'a solid track record and a number of externally funded projects'. To try and establish some common criteria for defining participation in the present study, we decided to examine the principles for staff promotion in the research and teaching job family set by the university where the study was located as indicators of academic success. Table 1 summarises these indicators and provides some examples for promotion to lecturer/assistant professor (L), associate professor (AP) and professor (P), the three academic levels represented by the participants in the study.

The article proceeds as follows. First, there is a brief consideration of the literature, with a special focus on the changing dynamic of skilled migration and the role played by English. Secondly, the participants and their stories are described. Next, we examine the key themes that emerged on analysing the participants' narratives, complementing this through using other networked data. In the final section the workplace pedagogic and policy implications of the findings are discussed.

Skilled migration

Systematic studies of skilled migration in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries did not begin until the 1960s. Since then, the topic has become an important area of research, with a tendency to examine the economic and social reasons for migration, together with the individual and social losses and gains produced by it. Early studies emphasised, for example, the emigration of professionals and technical experts, leaving countries such as the United Kingdom for the United States when the term 'brain drain' was first used to represent the presumed loss of human capital. The term was used later to refer to migration waves from less developed countries of the global South, when skilled workers left in search of a better economic and social future (Kofman 2000; Morgan, Sives, and Appleton 2006).

In contrast to the 'brain drain' studies, a number of researchers have emphasised the importance of 'brain gain' or 'brain circulation' (e.g., Appleton, Morgan, and Sives 2006; Stark 2004; Stark and Byra 2012). This occurs chiefly through an immigration wave of highly skilled professionals, which, in turn, stimulates economic development and a 'virtuous cycle' by which talent is developed and circulated, with benefits also to the country of origin of the skilled migrants.

Such studies have, in most cases, presented a polarised view of skilled migration, depicting it as a 'discrete and usually permanent act' (Ackers 2010, 83). However, contemporary migration has become an increasingly complex phenomenon, resisting either–or classifications. Not only are there other reasons for migration, such as 'forced migration' due to conflict-, development- or disaster-induced displacement (Hasegawa 2007), which go

Table 1. Main indicators of academic success.

Level on the research and teaching job family	World changing research	Excellence in education – teaching and learning	Engaging with business/external stakeholders – knowledge exchange	University and academic service – leadership and management	Esteem indicators	Global reach – international
Lecturer/ assistant professor	Published research which demonstrates an upward trajectory in terms of research quality at internationally excellent standards	Excellent standard of teaching performance at various levels (e.g. undergraduate, postgraduate) as judged by evaluation methods including student feedback, peer review and internal and external awards	Sustained track record of success in knowledge exchange to improve the performance of business and wider stakeholders – as illustrated by research and teaching contracts, Intellectual Property (IP) commercialisation and/or consultancy income	Sustained performance of academic administrative duties, either within or on behalf of the Subject/School (e.g. course leadership)	Membership of an appropriate professional teaching body	Supporting developments and new initiatives at international campuses
Associate professor	Principal investigator or significant contributor on grants	Contributing to a major initiative in the growth of UG or PGT numbers	Sustained track record of success in knowledge exchange to improve the performance of	Service within the wider subject community, e.g. external examining, committee service	Fellowship of subject-specific society	Developing new and existing international research and/or

(*Continued*)

Table 1 (*Continued*).

Level on the research and teaching job family	World changing research	Excellence in education – teaching and learning	Engaging with business/external stakeholders – knowledge exchange	University and academic service – leadership and management	Esteem indicators	Global reach – international
		resulting in new income streams	business and wider stakeholders – as illustrated by research and teaching contracts, IP commercialisation and/or consultancy income	within learned bodies		teaching partnerships
Professor	A sustained record of scholarly outputs of international excellence over career to date	Sustained contribution to school (subject discipline) level learning and teaching committees	Sustained track record of success in knowledge creation and exchange to improve the performance of business and wider stakeholders – as illustrated by research and teaching contracts, IP commercialisation and/or consultancy income	Influencing and shaping the available resources as appropriate to meet the current and future needs of the university, including having a significant impact on the direction, strategy, objectives and results of the department/school/faculty/university	Reviewer for national and international research bodies	Promoting business engagement and IP commercialisation on an international level

beyond the basic economic reasons or the desire for social stability, there is also a realisation that motives may change over time. Similarly, individuals may combine different patterns of migration (permanent, temporary and circular) to the same or different countries over a given period of time. This creates a complex spatio-temporal pattern of employment mobility (Ackers and Gill 2008).

In an attempt to avoid such polarised accounts, some researchers have preferred to examine the different dimensions of skilled migration itself, rather than focus on its economic and social consequences. Scott (2006), for example, identified criteria for classifying and exploring the dimensions of skilled migration. He highlights four different types: geographical areas (e.g., core or peripheral economies), occupations (e.g., academics, researchers and students), levels of skills (e.g., professionals, technicians) and time scale (e.g., permanent, temporary). However, like studies that used the 'brain drain/brain gain' orientation', such classifications have also tended to simplify issues and fail to deal with the complexities of skilled migration. Again such dimensions emerged from the focus on 'elite corporate expatriates who have been the main beneficiaries of globalisation' (Scott 2006, 1108). This narrow approach has resulted in an oversimplification of or disregard for the diverse social composition and central drivers of contemporary skilled migration.

Recent decades have seen the growth of an international middle class with skills that have been developed post-industrially. This means that skilled migration now includes a greater and more varied group of migrants than in former years (Scott 2006; Wright and Upward 2004), with fresh aspirations such as strategic career moves, the search for stability or security and opportunities for social networking and professional collaboration. These emerging dimensions of skilled migration have led to a review of the nature and reasons for migration. Researchers such as Williams and Balatz (2009) and Ackers (2010) have recently suggested that more nuanced examinations of skilled migration are needed, that explain the relationship between skilled migration experiences, knowledge exchange, and internationalisation processes. An analysis of the relationships among these factors may reveal a fresh and evolving dynamic of skilled migration. This is attempted in the next section, focusing on academics in British HE.

The changing dynamic of skilled migration: academics across borders

Traditionally, skilled migration has been analysed according to dimensions such as main drivers and time scale (Scott 2006). The most significant motivation for academics who decide to cross geographical borders seems to be the advancement of their professional career. As Scott (2006) identified in his study of British expatriates, academics have strong professional motivation and professional identifications that are main drivers for migration.

As for time scales, the migration of academics has been conventionally described as either permanent or circular. However, contemporary migration requires a reconsideration of the temporal dimension. For instance, some studies suggest that skilled migration should also take into account students who complete a postgraduate degree abroad, as they have an enhanced potential to migrate to the country where they studied (e.g., Hugo 2002; Jiang et al. 2010; Khadria 2001). This extends the notion of temporality in skilled migration. From a different perspective, and using the preliminary results of a current study, Ackers (2010) has suggested that mobility be viewed as a continuum that includes 'short stays' and 'visits' on a time scale more limited than those studied traditionally.

The changing nature and dynamic of contemporary skilled migration also requires researchers to consider other, and possibly more important, factors in migration. Ackers (2010) has suggested that research on skilled migration should take into account how it is interpreted as cultural capital and knowledge exchange in the context of internationalisation of education. The meanings and value of the migration experience may vary depending on the stage of the professional career of the migrant, as shown in Bart's and Xue's views on success reported above. Similarly, the tendency to view knowledge exchange for scientific development as related directly to temporality needs further consideration. Ackers (2010, 42) argues that 'certain forms of more circulatory and transnational mobility may be more effective in promoting knowledge exchange and meaningful internationalisation than one-off long term stays'.

These changing aspects of skilled migration have been accompanied by a shift in the way we refer to it. The discourse of skilled migration is gradually changing from a socioeconomic phenomenon that results in 'brain drain/brain gain' to constructing it discursively as an opportunity for the circulation of human capital. Thus, new terms such as 'brain exchange' and 'brain circulation' are replacing the older 'brain drain' and 'brain gain' terms (Le 2008). This shift describes a major change in the temporal and agency aspects of skilled migration: a greater number of skilled migrants are now returning to their countries of origin and are agents of social and economic development. Indeed, even while still abroad, skilled migrants create opportunities, as a diaspora, for networking and knowledge exchange and circulation with professionals who have remained in their countries. As previous studies (e.g., Rizvi 2007; Seguin et al. 2006; Tejada Gerrero and Bolay 2005) have pointed out, recent developments in technology (e.g., email and social networks) and globalisation have made it possible for migrants to remain in contact with their home countries and thus contribute to their social, cultural and economic development.

These emerging changes in agency, especially in terms of its relationship with structure, demand more dynamic theoretical and analytical approaches

that can produce a nuanced understanding of how agency and structure interact in contexts like the one examined in the present study, without privileging one over the other. One such approach is proposed by Archer (1995, 2003) who developed a methodology she called 'analytical dualism' by which the properties, powers and linkages between the 'people' in society and the 'parts' of society are explained as connected but being of a different type (Archer 1995, 15). Although a detailed account of her work is beyond this article, the three different cycles that take place over time in her approach – structural conditioning, social interaction and structural elaboration – are relevant to the study reported here. Structural conditioning, Archer (1995, 327) explains, exists 'by the prior distribution of resources, of life chances, of vested interests and of bargaining powers that are mediated to agents situationally'. The second cycle, social interaction, is 'conditioned by the former, by other structural factors which also impinge on agents, by social affinities and antagonisms between them, and ultimately by the reflexive monitoring of an inalienably innovative agency'. Structural elaboration, the third cycle, is 'quintessentially dependent upon how (or whether) in the precise combination of conditioning and contingency, bargaining power is converted into negotiating strength between corporate agents'. Thus, structure and agency, albeit interrelated, are irreducible to one another. Rather, they shape one another through conditioning, interaction and elaboration. By finding new ways to negotiate their multilingual identities, the participants in our study can be seen to interact with rather than accommodate to structural conditioning (e.g., adapting to the host cultures and norms), thus producing examples of structural elaboration (e.g., mutually beneficial communication goals).

Still the role of language has been largely absent from studies of skilled migration (Canagarajah 2013) despite the well-established recognition that language proficiency is a central component of human capital in the labour market (UK Border Agency 2012; The Economist Intelligence Unit 2012), and the English language requirements that immigration authorities demand for work visas, often 'certified' by the same tests required from international students (e.g., the Test of English as a Foreign Language, the International English Language Testing System). In the next section we consider language competency aspects of skilled migration.

Skilled migration and English as an international language

As we have said, most studies of skilled migration have privileged the social, political and economic factors that motivate migration to English-speaking countries like the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia. In the same way, the intellectual and economic opportunities offered by these countries have been at the centre of most of this research. Other factors important to human capital transfer have been neglected in the

literature (Adsera and Pytlikova 2010). Language proficiency and its mediating role in facilitating or hindering skilled migration, for instance, have received much less research attention (see, however, Adsera and Pytlikova 2010; Canagarajah 2013). This is despite increasing migration regulation in countries, such as the above, that have traditionally attracted skilled migrants. The governments of these countries now require international academics to meet a number of criteria, among which proficiency in the English language is essential for those aspiring to teach in a HE system where English is the medium of instruction (e.g., UK Border Agency 2012; Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2012).

In one of the few studies that relate skilled migration and language, Canagarajah (2013) offers a fascinating analysis of a number of language-related aspects in the translingual practices of skilled migrants to the United Kingdom and the United States. The main purpose of his book is the examination of language skills as a facilitating agent for the success of 'skilled migrants in their professions in host communities' (159), in an attempt to identify key issues in the interplay between skilled migration and competence in English. His study reports clear manifestations of agency of the skilled migrants through situational negotiation, a dynamic view of the existing norms in the host communities and a number of practice-based strategic responses to interlocutors and situations, all of which Canagarajah calls 'performative competence' (174).

Contrary to previous studies on migrants, which showed acceptance of the linguistic and sociolinguistic norms of the more powerful host community (e.g., Blommaert 2010, Dong and Blommaert 2009), Canagarajah (2013) demonstrates how norms are negotiated and modified by means of situational negotiation. Similarly, and in contrast to studies that have found a higher degree of accommodation to local norms in the behaviour of less skilled (e.g., Dong and Blommaert 2009) or less experienced migrants (e.g., Jiang et al. 2010), Canagarajah (2013) shows that skilled migrants are less ready to accommodate and are more prepared to negotiate roles and powers across a range of social and contextual features.

The skilled migrants in Canagarajah's study tended to hold a more dynamic view of such norms and powers. This allowed them to deploy a broader and more varied set of communicative and negotiation strategies in order to participate actively in their new professional environment, while at the same time maintaining their own identity and co-constructing new meanings and shared professional identities with their interlocutors.

Many of his participants managed to do this by resorting to their knowledge of how communication functions, rather than what communication is all about. This is what Canagarajah labels 'performative competence' which is the communicator's capacity for adaptation by aligning semiotic resources, contextual features and interlocutors with their own needs and interests.

Performative competence also includes interactional strategies (e.g., clarification and confirmation), recontextualisation strategies (e.g., terms of interaction), entextualisation strategies (e.g., monitoring text and talk) and co-operative disposition (acquiring values and skills in support of coexistence with others). In contexts where global English has become prominent, translingual speakers would thus work to align their strategic, linguistic and interactional competences so that their needs and those of their interlocutors are successfully met.

Canagarajah's work is important for furthering our understanding of how language in general, and English in particular, interacts with skilled migration. However, not all the elements in his framework could be represented in the present study as the range of strategies reported by our participants was not as varied. Methodological and contextual reasons may explain some of the differences. First, whereas Canagarajah's was an ethnographic study that included face-to-face and email interviews, observations and analysis of text and talk, ours is a sociolinguistic oriented study on narrated experiences. Second, our sample of participants (six academics) is much smaller and thus represents a smaller range of experiences. Next, our contextual reference was much more focused (a British university) and may have resulted in a seemingly 'homogenised' set of the experiences (see, however, the discussion of the profiles of the participants below).

What Canagarajah's and our study share in common, however, is the aim of making salient the relationship between skilled migration and language, which has been largely under-represented in the skilled migration literature. This lack of research attention to the dialectical relationship between language, especially English as an international language, and skilled migration raises a number of questions. First, what is the role of proficiency in English in the professional career of international academics in British HE? Secondly, what English language competences can be identified as most strategic for successful socialisation into schools and departments? Thirdly, what strategies do international academics deploy for successful communication with colleagues and students?

This article aims to answer these questions in an attempt to identify key factors that have facilitated the successful professional development of a group of academics at a British university and to advance our understanding of how this can inform workplace pedagogical and policy issues when recruiting as well as supporting international academics (Appleton, Sives, and Morgan 2006; Morgan, Sives, and Appleton 2006).

The narrators and their stories

The study reported on here is part of a larger project entitled 'Journeys into Higher Education in the UK' that aims at tracing the successful trajectory of non–British academics into the British HE system. After initial email contact,

academics who met the ‘indicators of academic success’ summarised in Table 1 were invited to take part. Of those who accepted the invitation, six academics working at a leading university in the United Kingdom were interviewed about their employment paths into HE. Although small, the sample is representative of recent trends in skilled migration on a number of counts. First, the participants worked in disciplines that have recently experienced considerable expansion in the number of international academics they hire. Secondly, together they represented both countries with a long history of migration to the United Kingdom (e.g., The Netherlands, China) and countries (e.g., Brazil, Mexico) whose skilled migrants have traditionally preferred to migrate to other parts of the world. Thirdly, they exemplify the possible career paths that international academics may follow in British HE (e.g., lecturer, associate professor, and professor). A description of the participants is given in Table 2.

The participants are not presented here as a homogeneous group. They have actually had different previous experiences with English and come from parts of the world where the language represents different social currency. Neither are they considered representative of the skilled migrants teaching at universities in the United Kingdom. Complex conditions, such as their previous educational experiences (e.g., Maria attended a Spanish/English bilingual school) and the prestigious social position afforded by proficiency in English in their home countries (e.g., Brazil, China, Mexico), have played a significant role in who they are and why they decided to emigrate. This will be discussed later on in the article.

As to its method for data collection and analysis, the study used ‘narrative networks’. Gimenez (2010, 206) defines such narrative networks as a ‘group of stories, texts and artefacts collected around the emerging issues in a core

Table 2. Main demographics of the participants.

Pseudonym (gender)	Country of origin	Faculty/position	Highest degree/ country	Years in UK	Years in UK HE
Maria (F)	Mexico	Social Science/ Lecturer	PhD/UK	25	24
Xue (F)	China	Social Science/ Associate Professor	PhD/UK	14	10
Antonia (F)	Brazil	Engineering/ Associate Professor	PhD/UK	9	5
Andreas (M)	Germany	Sciences/Lecturer	PhD/UK	9	8
Bart (M)	Holland	Social Science/ Lecturer	PhD/Holland	9	9
Wei (M)	China	Engineering/ Professor	PhD/UK	26	23

narrative'. Involving a continuous cycle of data collection and data analysing – which starts with the core narratives told by the main narrators – the networks show not only what the stories, the texts, the artefacts and the core narrative have in common but also how they differ, thus broadening the analytical perspective and helping tensions and contradictions emerge during analysis. By bringing personal narratives and social objects together, networks facilitate connections to be made between the meanings and functions of personal narratives enacted in their local contexts (e.g., professional experiences and development afforded to international lecturers by their proficiency in English) and how these reflect more macro sets of social and institutional meanings and patterns (e.g., their universities' stated or implied demands for career advancement).

The interview narratives were elicited through a combination of semi-structured questions and visual cues acting as thematic prompts. Visual cues, which are visual stimuli representing a possible sequence of main narrating events as illustrated in Figure 1, have proved to be effective aids for eliciting narratives as they can enhance thematic and temporal recall of life events (Axinn, Pearce, and Ghimire 1999; Belli 1998). Cain (2003) has demonstrated that participants' narrative performance improves with the use of these types

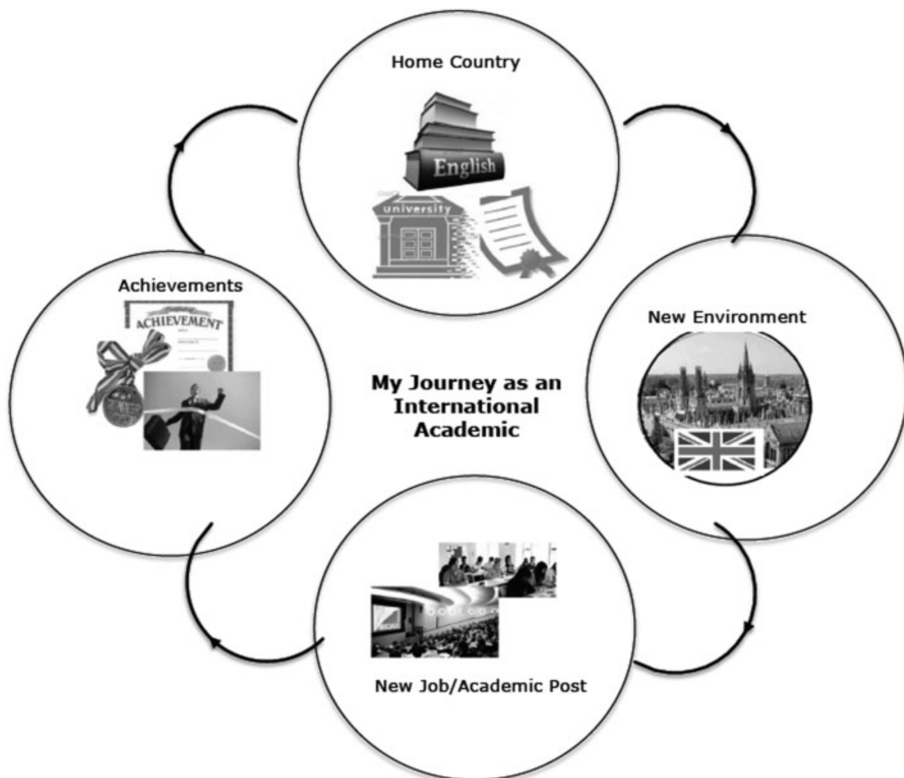

Figure 1. Example of visual cues used in the study.

Table 3. Components of narrative networks.

Narratives	Documents	Artefacts
Participants' interview narratives	(1) UK Home Office immigration policy guidance (UK Border Agency 2012) (2) Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship (2012) (3) University documents relating to staff recruitment	(1) Participants' university web pages (2) Email signatures
Data from email interview with a university HR adviser.		

of cues. They can also help interviewers to ask related questions in the appropriate sequence (Axinn, Pearce, and Ghimire 1999).

The interviews lasted between 40 and 60 minutes, were audio recorded and later transcribed[2] for qualitative analysis by thematic coding. Following the main principles of narrative networks (Gimenez 2010) described above, the interview narratives were networked with other data and a number of texts and artefacts. Table 3 shows the constitution of the networks that were designed for the study reported on in this article.

Emerging themes and key factors in the narratives

In this section of the article we examine three themes that have emerged from coding the interview narratives. These themes have been selected due to their recurrent emergence across the narratives, their spontaneous occurrence during the ongoing interaction between the participants and the interviewers and the ecological perspective they offer in that they represent meaningful themes for the participants.

Below we discuss the role that English proficiency as 'embodied cultural capital' (Bourdieu 1986) played in the participants' successful employment paths as well as the tensions associated with it. Next, we consider the English competences that the participants identified as required for successful socialisation into their schools or departments. We then examine the strategies that the interviewees identified for successful communication in their professional contexts. The analysis of these core themes was complemented by an examination of the other components in the narrative networks (see Table 3).

English proficiency and academic success

The six academics interviewed referred to the central role that proficiency in English had played in their successful academic trajectories. It supported them not only in doing their every day jobs but also in advancing their professional

careers. They also mentioned how much hard work becoming proficient in English had required and, in some cases, how demanding it still was either to maintain it or develop it to the next level. When explaining 'the next level', Xue, for example, draws an interesting parallel between her proficiency in English and her development as a critical professional, which points to the clear role of language proficiency in the professional growth of migrant academics:

> the challenge is always there it hasn't become easier I suppose before when I was academically and linguistically less strong I was probably less critical of my own writing but now I'm becoming more critical of my thinking and … at the same time you have higher standards for what you want to write and how you want to write … you know you will be challenged by colleagues in and outside the university that you're being read and discussed more widely … I don't think it has become any easier at all.

Along similar lines, Bart narrates his own disposition to improving his English by making reference to some of the strategies he uses to become more proficient in the language:

> When I'm working I always have the [electronic] English dictionary and Google running you know just to check whether there's a better synonym for the word I'm using or to find the right preposition, I know I can write pretty decent English by now but I also know there's always something I will need improve, I will always need to do more work if I want to become more proficient.

In the narratives of the participants, English proficiency clearly represents an example of Bourdieu's (1986) 'embodied cultural capital'. He identified three forms of cultural capital, one of which was 'embodied cultural capital' that he defined as 'the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body' (47). Different from capital that can be acquired, such embodied cultural capital requires investment of time and effort by the individual. As such, proficiency in the local language was valued highly by both the participants and their institution as it represented a fundamental requirement for successful professional activities, development and career advancement. The role of English proficiency in professional activities and its value for career advancement were mentioned several times by the participants during the interviews:

> English proficiency is absolutely essential to do your job and also to make professional progress you know, er, luckily I went to a bilingual school run by British people so I start I learnt English and Spanish at the same time (right) so from a very early age I had a bilingual education so I think that helped me specially to pick up the phonological system so that my accent was not so … different. (Maria)

> I had to work really hard for years to improve my English but still over the years I have seen how much my English has improved through writing through interactions with […] communications with colleagues it still takes longer to

> write to compose emails to write a paper and still make mistakes that are unique to second language learners but I think it is it is at the same time quite rewarding once you get your paper and your work being recognised. (Xue)

> I think it's [proficiency in English] central to everything you do as an academic you know it's at the centre of everything whether you're writing a book a paper er an email teaching or giving a presentation […] it speaks about you who you are, fundamental when you work in a British university. (Jasen)

It is interesting to notice that, for these academics, English language proficiency has become part of their cultural capital, a constitutive element of their professional lives and their professional selves: 'to do your job', 'make professional progress', 'being recognised' and 'speaks about you who you are', even when they may sometimes feel they still need to more work to feel 'really comfortable with the language when you are at work' (Bart).

Proficiency in English as embodied cultural capital has been instrumental for the academic success of the participants and a constitutive element of their disciplinary identity (Hyland 2012). This is reflected in the way they present themselves and describe their academic achievements on their university web pages:

> has published chapters in edited publications on [areas][3] and the use of [area]. Maria has attracted funding to work on projects on [areas]. (Maria)

> has contributed to the success of a range of international and national projects as [roles], including a [Research Council] project on [area], a [Another Research Council] project on [area], and a [Another Research Council] on [area]. (Xue)

> manages a research project on [area] in the [geographical area]. The project is funded [Research Council]. The project assesses [information]. It seeks to identify the drivers and [information]. His research has been published in [names of seven journals]. (Jasen)

Even a cursory analysis of the electronic signatures in their email templates shows how successful the trajectories of this group of international academics in UK HE have been:

> Vice Chair, British Association for [name of Association]. (Xue)

> Head of [division of a department]. (Antonia)

> Course leader for [course]. (Jasen)

The centrality of English proficiency as a requirement for performing in the professional context researched was reinforced by the institutional requirements as expressed by the Human Resources adviser:

> proficiency in English is a basic requirement for any applicants to a lecturing or research position at the university as specified in our job ads.

The official view of the role that English proficiency plays in the British labour market, and in achieving success, can also be found in the policy guidance published by the UK Immigration and Nationality Directorate:

> English is the most widely spoken language of the UK. The ability to speak English well enables success in the UK labour market and assists in integration. (UK Border Agency 2012, 25)

There is no denying that proficiency in English is a form of embodied cultural capital which is recognised by the participants and institutions such as their university and the immigration authorities, not only as 'a basic requirement' but also as instrumental variable for the development of a successful professional employment path in HEIs and the effective construction of a disciplinary identity (Hyland 2012). This will be explored further in the next section. As the 'snapshots' of data in this section show, proficiency in English has played a significant role in becoming successful professionals or in Jasen's words: 'none of this would have been possible if I hadn't had enough English'.

Although our study did not specifically look into how the participants had gathered such capital, from the data collected it can be seen that social factors are important variables in considering the relationship between English in general and proficiency in the language in particular and mobility across borders. In the case of our participants, migration may have been facilitated by access to resources (e.g., bilingual education) and social status afforded by proficiency in English (e.g., in countries like China, Mexico or Brazil).

However, proficiency in English, or the lack of it, can act as a barrier to the allocation of resources and positions, even more strongly than the appropriate professional skills and qualifications, all forms of what Archer (1995) calls 'structural conditioning'. As Antonia, who was at the time of the study holding a senior research position in her department, said: 'I know sometimes positions of responsibility are not offered to some colleagues because they don't have enough English even if they have the necessary skills and qualifications.' This view was also expressed by Bart: 'Although they may have enough experience in [field], these positions would not be offered to them unless they had the right level of English.' Views like these make it imperative for issues around proficiency in English to be unpacked and the relationship between skilled migration and language to be 'denaturalised' as we will discuss later.

The participants also acknowledged difficulties and tensions created by, inter alia, the variety of English sanctioned in their professional contexts. In particular, they mentioned having to face difficulties and negative attitudes when they sometimes made mistakes associated with second-language speakers, their accent diverted from what is perceived as 'a British accent' or their use of English was literal rather than idiomatic.

What is probably more important to observe, however, is that the academics in our research showed a clear sense of agency when faced with these difficulties and tensions, a behaviour also observed in the participants of Canagarajah's (2013) study. For instance, Maria, a native Spanish speaker, explains she would ask a colleague – home or international – to read what she has written when she thinks it a more idiomatic expression would enhance its clarity:

> You know that we[4] sometimes use more words than needed in English and when not sure I'd ask another colleague not necessarily a native speaker to read what I've written and see if I need to make changes judging by their reaction to the text.

Similarly, Wei, a native speaker of Mandarin, narrates how he has agentively developed strategies to deal with the possible negative impact that his accent may have on his interlocutors:

> Because of Mandarin I tend to put an accent at the end of most words even those that have an accent at the beginning, I speak very fast, and I don't open my mouth very much, this sometimes creates confusion and so over the years I have learnt to speak more clearly, I now take my time to speak … if I have to speak in public I practise how my words sound and I always check if they understand me, don't rush any more.

These are examples of the participants' 'social interactions' (Archer 1995, 2003) in which they enact their capacity for innovative agency. The academics in our study also showed a sharp awareness of the opportunities for negotiation and active participation that tensions offered, as will become clearer when we discuss their strategies for effective communication.

English language competences for successful socialisation

A number of competences in the English language were identified as important to the participants' successful socialisation[5] into their professional contexts. Those competences that recurred across the data sets included advanced reading skills, clarity of expression and linguistic positioning.

The ability to read complex texts and documents was mentioned by four of the six academics, emphasising that specific skills that go beyond the basic four skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) are central when performing departmental roles of responsibility that require working with academics and professionals across the university. Antonia's and Wei's narratives offer examples:

> reading is key to performing certain roles you know for example now in my new role I'm having to deal with some very difficult documents reports and so on

> that I wouldn't be able to do if my reading skills were not up to the level required so you know reading is quite an important skills I think. (Antonia)

> when you reach a certain position then you you read a lot you read of course journal articles and research reports but you also have to read documents to be prepared for meetings with people from other departments, er, people from other universities and institutions so the ability to read complex documents is something you need. (Wei)

Antonia's and Wei's narratives also show that successful socialisation into their professional communities meant the responsibility of representing their departments within and outside the university, which points, at the same time, to the centrality of this and other associated competences.

Similarly, clarity of expression in spoken English was mentioned several times across the six narratives. In some of the narratives, this skill was further broken down into sub-skills that included giving oneself time to phrase thoughts effectively, responding directly and making a contribution. This is illustrated in Xue's narrative:

> It's good I think sometimes to slow down you know not to respond quickly when you, er, when you need to to be clear you need to give yourself more thinking space you know to say things in an effective way […] also I think one needs to learn to respond in a more direct way especially if you are Chinese this will help to you to you know make a contribution to the discussion you may be having with colleagues.

It is important to notice here that clarity of expression does not only refer to the ability to speak the local language 'correctly' but to a more strategic positioning where the speaker clearly aligns their strategic, linguistic and interactional competences to meet their needs as well as those of their interlocutor (Canagarajah 2013).

Another central competence that recurred across the narrative data was what we have labelled 'linguistic positioning'. This refers to the ability of individuals to discursively create and negotiate their identities when interacting with colleagues (Hyland 2012). By using the linguistic resources that make up their embodied cultural capital, the academics in our study often narrated how they constructed and co-constructed a location for themselves in their professional contexts. This was also evidenced in the way they positioned themselves in their university web pages and their email signatures as illustrated above.

Wei, possibly the most accomplished of the six academics, for instance, narrated several instances of how he, as an international academic in the United Kingdom, had managed to negotiate several aspects of his professional identity (e.g., a learner of English, a Chinese man, and a professor in British HE) by means of linguistic positioning:

> and although I come from a completely different culture and speak English as a foreign language which meant making mistakes and learning from them I managed to find my place in my department first, then in the faculty and then at the university when I became a professor I still remember that day and the professorial lecture where I spoke of my background, my languages and my position.

It emerges from this discussion, that, like language proficiency, specific language competences are central aspects in the professional life of these international academics. It is important to notice that the specific competences that the academics identified for successful socialisation into their departments have required learning new ways of doing things. This act of learning has transformed who they were and, in this 'process of becoming' (Wenger 1998), new identities have been negotiated and emerged as Wei's narrative above has illustrated. This ability to transform and find new ways of discursively locating and re-locating themselves, even in the face of difficulties and challenges, are clear examples of what Archer (1995, 327) calls 'structural elaboration', that is 'bargaining power [that] is converted into negotiating strength' in her own words. These are important qualities of the narratives we collected as we show in the next section.

Linguistic strategies for effective communication

In their narratives the six academics also mentioned a number of linguistic strategies which they had found useful for effective communication with colleagues and students. The most frequently mentioned were efforts to increase intelligibility and strategies for negotiation. Five of the six academics interviewed made comments about the need and the benefits of working to achieve intelligibility, understood as 'getting the message across' (Maria), 'avoid being misunderstood' (Bart) and 'getting what you need' (Wei), rather than linguistic accuracy in their professional contexts:

> I think one of the aims of any international member of staff should be working hard to achieve a level of intelligibility that facilitates their being understood correctly and getting their message across. (Maria)

> What international staff need to do I believe is to be reach a level where […] where you can say things and, er, your colleagues or students understand exactly what you want to say you know trying to avoid being misunderstood you know. (Bart)

> That's key I think speaking in a clear way, in a way that will give you what you need getting what you need obviously respecting the people you're talking to sure. (Wei)

These views provide support for claims made in other studies. Cook (1999) has long advocated the need to place more emphasis on the effective strategies

deployed by successful international speakers of English, rather than on the norms embodied in the native speakers of the language. In a similar vein, Pennycook (2007, 103) has referred to 'international intelligibility' as one of the benefits of global English and one of the communicative goals in transnational contexts. More recently Canagarajah (2013, 171) has argued that, in transnational communicative spaces, people work together to achieve their communication objectives and negotiate differences, which means they 'don't depend on codes alone but on negotiation practices'. In other words, effective communicators in transnational contexts are more interested in co-constructing situational norms than accommodating to formal linguistic norms of accuracy.

As to the negotiation practices that Canagarajah mentions, the participants in our study referred to the need for keeping a flexible attitude and cultivating an eagerness to negotiate in the face of difficulties and conflict:

> It's very important I think to be open and flexible to be ready to negotiate our differences and to listen to others not only to learn how to say things but also to see what they need and then negotiate between their needs and yours. (Bart)

> *I always try to especially in my new role in the department to keep an open* mind and try to see what others say and want this gives me an idea of how we can reach a middle point a negotiation of aims and needs. (Antonia)

These views show the agency of these international academics at play with structural norms when interacting with others, evidencing the interplay between structural conditioning, social interaction, and structural elaboration (Archer 1995, 2003). Instead of adopting an assimilationist orientation, they not only showed patience and flexibility but also creative agency by means of disposition and determination to achieve mutually beneficial communication goals. These attitudes and dispositions may sometimes seem at odds with those sanctioned by institutions and organisations, even those that have embraced internationalisation as part of their mission and vision (see next section).

The recurring themes that emerged from analysing the narratives of the six academics manifest important issues in the relationship between language and skilled migration. Through their narratives we found that successful international academics possess the necessary linguistic resources and proficiency in the English language which has enabled effective integration and active participation in their professional contexts. More importantly, however, our participants showed that they possessed strategies that allowed them to establish a distinctive location in transnational communicative spaces. These strategies, however, are not universal and should therefore be supported by formal institutional efforts that should materialise through workplace pedagogy and policy. We discuss this in the next section.

Implications for workplace pedagogy and policy

Following our discussion of themes and key factors presented previously, this section examines their implications for workplace pedagogy and policy in an attempt to identify those responses that could facilitate other international academics' successful experiences in the UK HE sector. We frame workplace pedagogy following Billett's (2002, 2004) studies, and thus, we conceptualise it as institutionally situated practices that foster reciprocal workplace participation by means of which learning and new knowledge is generated.

Here, we then argue for the development and implementation of a workplace pedagogy that encourages the expansion of the skills and strategies that make up the sociolinguistic 'toolkit' of both locals and migrants that would allow them to engage in reciprocal collaboration meaningfully. We also claim that policy should establish institutional channels and practices that would raise awareness, formally and pragmatically, of the benefits of having a culturally and linguistically diverse staff given the internationalisation of HE. We see the relationship between workplace pedagogy and workplace policy central as change is unlikely to occur 'without intentionality in the organization of workplace activities and support' (Billett 2002, 28), and this intentionality should be not only structural but also agential, as will be further discussed below.

As our study has shown, skilled migration is becoming a more complex phenomenon and thus both migrants and locals need a wider range of the resources and strategies to deal with it. As we showed in the previous section, the participants described how they adopted a practices-based rather than an 'accommodationist' disposition to challenges created by operating in a discursive space that is now not only restricted to the locals. In increasingly internationalised HE institutions, there are communicative challenges that require a new set of dispositions, skills and strategies as the participants in this and previous studies have shown (e.g., Billett 2004; Canagarajah 2013).

Thus, based on our albeit limited findings, we argue for a pedagogy that both enhances and expands the existing resources of academics and professionals who come to interact in new and more complex linguistic spaces. Such pedagogy would be based on the communicatively functional view of language that, as Canagarajah (2013, 171) has eloquently put it, 'accommodates intelligibility rather than correctness.' It could include, for instance, institutionally supported spaces and opportunities for discussing and developing strategies like the ones mentioned by the participants that allow those working in international contexts to approach transnational relations as opportunities to create new communicative realities that effectively negotiate and celebrate rather than ignore differences.

In terms of policy, in many British higher institutions the general attitude towards skilled migration has been one of assimilation by which international staff are expected to assimilate to the values and norms of the host country.

The discourse used to refer to the experiences of international staff in the literature we reviewed for the present study revealed some of these expectations around 'assimilation' in a number of different geographical contexts (e.g., Garson 2005; Markee 1997), and in the UK in particular (e.g., Hsieh 2012; Jiang et al. 2010; Luxon and Peelo 2009). In Luxon and Peelo (2009), for instance, there is frequent reference to the fact that non-UK staff 'need to reshape the[ir] social knowledge' (654), 'rethink how they might now be able to do this' (654) and learn to deal with 'complex cultural and linguistic challenges' (658). Luxon and Peelo (2009) actually questioned whether international academics' 'prior acculturation as teachers is valued or whether, in reality, is seen as problematic' (657). In a similar vein, Jiang et al. (2010) and Hsieh (2012) have reported similar experiences: international academics are expected to 'adjust to the new academic environment' (Jiang et al. 2010, 156), 'adjust and change in relation to the new academic environment' (Jiang et al. 2010, 157), make 'efforts in adjusting and accommodating to the local educational, cultural and language differences' (Hsieh 2012, 372), and 'should understand and adapt to the new culture in the host environment' (Hsieh 2012, 378). Kim and Brooks (2012), based on the experiences of one of their participants, report a rather extreme position in which 'foreign professors are to be kept in their places' (12). As reflected in this brief list of experiences, this assimilationist approach has neglected the contributions that difference and diversity can make to institutions and organisations. By the same token, it has naturalised the relationship between skilled migration and language, although this is gradually being resisted and contested by skilled migrants as we have seen in the previous discussions. Like the researchers in these studies, we would argue for the need to make the experiences of international academic less unidirectional and to encourage more diversity in the workplaces by creating opportunities to work towards cultural, social and linguistic transformative collaboration.

Our findings seem to indicate that skilled migrants bring with them a range of skills, strategies and values that, given the proper consideration and space in term of workplace pedagogy and policy, can contribute to enrich the professional experience of both home and international staff, and the educational experience of the student population. Approaches to teaching and learning, work ethics, and that international academics learnt and developed before they migrated can enrich those of the host country and possibly help to develop new knowledge, dispositions and understandings by means of what we call 'transformative collaboration'. Transformative collaboration can make significant contributions to internationalisation of HE where a new set of principles, values and dispositions develop out of the dialectical relationship between those from the host country and those that the international academics bring with them and produce what Archer (1995) refers to as 'structural elaboration'.

Similarly, the naturalisation of the connection between skilled migration and language fails to emphasise the central role that proficiency in English plays in the professional advancement of international staff. As the successful academics in our study said, English proficiency was central to what they have become. More studies that look at successful academics in British HE institutions are needed so that the contributions of skilled migrants are better understood and the connection between skilled migration, its contributions and proficiency in English becomes more visible. This new understanding could then inform workplace pedagogy and policy.

In contexts where assimilation is the norm, the attitudes towards international staff and students continue to be one of linguistic, social and cultural assimilation with an overemphasis on local forms and conventions over new messages and meanings created out of the interaction between the language and culture of the locals and that of the internationals. In such contexts, it is important to start by clearly articulating and openly discussing the sociopolitics of multilingual communication at both institutional and personal levels. This open dialogue would help to enhance the visibility and transparency of policies for and attitudes towards international staff and students. In this respect, pedagogy and policy should emphasise, as some of the participants in this study mentioned, an inclination to 'being a lifelong learner' or in Duff's (2008, 257) words a disposition for 'lifelong and lifewide learning'. Pedagogy and policy should both, as Canagarajah (2013) has suggested, focus on developing not only new strategies (e.g., negotiation strategies, strategic competence) but also new dispositions towards lifelong and life-wide learning in the workplace.

HE employers would gain insights into the nature of skilled migration and could consider formalising practices that happen informally (e.g., through informal contact with colleagues) by means of induction events that explore issues that go beyond the formal requirement of proficiency in English. Similarly, efforts to encourage collaboration such as institution-wide professional networks could result in shared good practice (e.g., how successful international academics communicate with students and colleagues) and the development of new dispositions (e.g., approaching difficulties as opportunities). Formalised through policy, efforts like these would enable HEIs and national organisations to adopt appropriate strategies for both academic planning and human resource management which would in turn maximise the benefits of skilled migration (Morgan, Sives, and Appleton 2006).

Conclusion

In this article we aimed to contribute to the discussion of skilled migration and the role that language and English as an international language in particular plays in it. A more nuanced examination of the connection between language and skilled migration would help to bring out the benefits of being proficient

in English for the professional careers of skilled migrants, of effective communication in internationalised universities and of acquiring new dispositions for dealing with challenging professional situations for both locals and migrants.

The increasing number of international academics working in the United Kingdom is a clear indication that British universities and colleges still provide opportunities for professional development. By the same token, international staff members also make significant contributions to specific areas of teaching, learning and research.

However, the issues of language and identity that result from the dislocation and relocation of skilled migrants need further consideration in research on skilled migration (Collins, Baynham, and Slembrouck 2009). Future research should consider, for example, the roles that the linguistic resources that make up the embodied cultural capital of skilled migrants can play within institutional practices (Canagarajah 2013). HE institutions wishing to internationalise need to ensure that the issues that come with the recruitment of international academics are recognised and that such academics are valued for the totality of what they bring to the institutions. Only then will reciprocal participation (Billett 2002) and transformative collaboration be possible.

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Notes

1. All names are pseudonyms used to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants.
2. The language and stylistic preferences of the participants have not been edited.
3. Specific information has been deleted to guarantee the non-traceability of the participants.
4. Maria is using inclusive ‘we’ here as the interviewer is also a native speaker of Spanish.
5. We prefer the term ‘socialisation’ to ‘acculturation’ and ‘accommodation’ as it refers to a ‘bi- or multidirectional process in which not only novices but also more experienced community members are being socialized by mutual engagement’ (Duff 2008, xv).

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