

# **A Facebook-based Debate Through English as a *Lingua Franca*: A Move Toward Intercultural Awareness for a World of Differences**

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**Abstract:** Against the increasingly internationalized nature of higher education across the world using English as a *lingua franca* (ELF), the research reported by this paper is focused around an eight-week Facebook-based debate course to assist university learners of English in Iraq and their international counterparts in the US to negotiate and share social practices and other meanings through intercultural communications using ELF. Baker's (2011) model of intercultural awareness is presented as the model underpinning its aims. Through thematic analysis, the results reveal participants' ICA development, conceptual change, and representation of both in their intercultural communication as a social practice. Clearly, native-like proficiency in English is not at stake. The results show how dynamically emerging and situated the relationship is between ELF and users' cultures are for self and other (re-)presentation, a point that needs to be given considerable attention in higher-education contexts.

**Keywords:** Facebook debates, intercultural awareness, English as a *lingua franca* (ELF), qualitative research.

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## **1. Introduction**

The increasingly international nature of higher education means that intercultural issues are of greater importance than ever. Accompanying this increase in intercultural connections in higher education has been a rise in the use of English to facilitate communication between students of different linguacultural backgrounds. English as a *lingua franca* (ELF henceforth) is used for intercultural communication. As per Baker (2011: 200), intercultural communication in this context is defined as a "sociocultural process" requiring users of English to recognize and respond flexibly to the complex, emergent relationship between English language, culture and communication. The intercultural dimension is often cited as one of the major drivers of internationalization of higher education. The need to develop it has been acknowledged in theory and practice (Knight 2006, Ryan 2011, Killick 2013). Students in international higher-education programs are often expected to develop their intercultural awareness and cultivate an identity as intercultural citizens. This involves recognizing the global scale of social relations, respecting and valuing diversity, and participating in communities at multiple levels from local to global (Killick 2013). However, there is insufficient evidence concerning the extent to which experiences of internationalization lead to development of intercultural awareness. The intercultural dimension of higher education is typically not incorporated in a systematic or in-depth manner in higher-education policy or practice (Baker 2016). How linguistic issues relate to intercultural development is far from clear. Given the key role of language, especially English, in intercultural communication and the internationalization of universities, this issue needs to be given greater prominence.

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It is crucial that Iraqi higher-education institutions are able to engage with international education networks and this research endeavors to do so. Given Iraq's history of geopolitical tensions and conflict, intercultural issues are of particular relevance. This study aims to develop Iraqi university students' intercultural awareness by engaging them in an online intercultural debate course through ELF with students at an international US university. The US has been at the forefront of the internationalization of education, with its increasingly multilingual and multicultural student populations. The theoretical basis for this research is Baker's (2011) model of intercultural awareness (see also Baker 2015, Kusumaningputri & Widodo 2018, Yu & Meale 2018), but more research is needed.

The study is built around an eight-week Facebook-based debate course to help university students from Iraq and the US successfully negotiate and share thoughts through ELF-based intercultural communication. The Iraqi students should be enabled to understand how cultural norms and frames of reference can be flexibly conceptualized in intercultural communication as a way to celebrate differences in the world. A qualitative approach sits well in this context in virtue of both the exploratory nature of this research and its focus on participants' own interpretations of their experiences. The data primarily comes through analysis of transcriptions of Facebook debates/comments (text and video). Analysis involves a mixture of top-down coding based on the research aims and ICA model with emergent bottom-up codes derived from the data (Miles et al. 2014).

### **1.1 Theoretical considerations**

Adopting a particular culture to represent a group of Anglophone speakers as a model for English-language teaching has become hard to sustain. As per Baker (2009), I would argue that equipping English-language learners with the language's more general structural features is no assurance of their success in intercultural communication. Intercultural communication requires users of English to recognize and respond flexibly. ELF teachers should not consider culture a solidified object with clear socio-geographic reference to its speakers (Canagarajah 2007, Pennycook 2007). Instead, a post-cultural, post-normative approach is required (Kumaravadivelu 2006, Dewey 2012). Wolf (2014: 449) argues that:

Given the multilingual and multicultural reality of most countries in the world, it would indeed be fallacious to equate a nation with a particular culture. Yet it would be equally fallacious to equate a language with a culture, as cultures, or, perhaps less reifying, cultural conceptualizations may be shared across different languages and groups of speakers....

Students need to be aware of the diverse nature of our postmodern world, a world that blurs and expands the fixed boundaries of the social and linguistic categories represented in an essentialist modernist paradigm (Pennycook 2010). Intercultural communication cannot be restricted to language proficiency but extends to include interlocutors' knowledge, attitudes, behavior and impact on their communication as social practice (Wolf 2014, Baker 2009). As in Bhabha's (1994: 55) "hybridity", there must be space for the enunciation of cultural differences where culture-related meanings and signs "can be appropriated, translated, re-historicized, and read anew".

Baker (2011: 202) argues that ICA is what speakers need in heterogeneous communities to negotiate and share meanings and social practices successfully; ICA is "a conscious understanding of the role culturally based forms, practices and frames of reference can have in intercultural communication, and an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context specific manner in real time communication". Baker's approach is broad enough to include individuals' knowledge, skills and behavior to avoid needing to make any distinction between competence and performance (Baker 2015). It is more than the cognitive

aspect of intercultural communication (Chen & Starosta 1999), more than a mere part of individuals' knowledge, comprehension and self-other recognition (Fantini 2000, Deardorff 2006, Korzilius *et al.* 2007).

As per Yu and Maele (2018), I find Baker's (2011) ICA model a suitable holistic framework to understand participants' attitudes and behavior in relation to their intercultural communication. Baker's model consists of three interacting levels: basic cultural, advanced cultural and intercultural awareness. Baker classifies ICA into two parts: conceptual ICA and practice-oriented ICA. While the former is fundamentally concerned with the individual's attitudes in relation to culture and culture-related knowledge for effective engagement in intercultural communication, the latter is more related to ICA-based practice with its focus on individuals' skills and behavior for applying that knowledge in intercultural communication. For Baker, the distinction among ICA's levels and components is transparent and non-linear. It is an interactive, reciprocal relationship where any development in individuals' attitudes or knowledge as part of conceptual ICA will somehow be reflected in their capacities for ICA-oriented practice.

## **1.2 A Facebook-based debate**

With the changing nature of students' educational profiles, cultural views, backgrounds, experience and knowledge (Wilkinson 1999), higher-education institutions need to try just-in-time educational adaptations (Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read 2002: 8). Laurillard (2012) highlights the key role technology has in aiding teaching and learning in these settings.

Although considerable attention has been paid to the use of the Internet to improve language learners' intercultural competence (Belz & Thorne 2006, Belz 2003) and Baker's (2012) use of e-learning to address relationships between language (variations in global English), culture and intercultural communication, the present research argues that there is more value to be gained in manipulating Facebook as a platform for debate. Baker (2012: 5) writes that this can be considered "one possible means of bringing a greater cultural dimension into the classroom in a manner that reflects the complexity of English use in global contexts". The goal is to have language learners more engaged in intercultural dialogue for self-other understanding with the realization of that in their ELF practice (Wolf 2014). This significantly promotes participants' socio-pragmatic competence where Facebook provides with a comfort zone for in-group inclusion as members of a community. It functions to avoid the appearance of ethnocentrism. It shapes participants' online cultural identity and online ethnic identity: all part of how culture and communication work to affect each other (Leeming & Danino 2012).

## **1.3 Debating self and other**

In education, debate is defined as a social practice that helps students work on finding out certain evidence for what they are with or against as part of their high-order thinking skills (Oros 2007). Having students involved in debate-based activities enables them to define the problem, reasonably assess available sources, identify challenges, inconsistent points of what is being debated about or argued on, which all at the end fall within the scope of their own criticality (Kennedy 2007). Going beyond 'yes/no' answers, they are in ideal scenarios more required to say why they agree or disagree on a point of debate (Zare & Othman 2013 and Jackson 2009).

Debate is not the subject of the present research. It is manipulated as a means for participating students to put their knowledge and attitudes about topics at hand in practice with ELF. This requires neither the researcher nor participants to have complete knowledge about any participants' cultures (Baker 2015, Wolf 2014). Students need not have their bags

packed, so to speak, to achieve international understanding of those they debate. The goal is to assist individuals to move from a process of enculturation to one of acculturation (Damen 1987: 140).

The research questions are

1. What are participants' views of the Facebook-based debate course they attended?
2. What are participants' perceptions of ELF in relation to the course?

## 2. Research methodology

The data is composed of two recorded semi-structured group interviews coordinated with participants' video conferences, Facebook comments, posts, reflection reports and emails. This reveals participants' conceptual ICA and the representation of that in their practice-oriented ICA, as part of real-time intercultural communication (Baker 2015).

With a collaborator at Seattle and Antioch universities in the US, I recruited 40 students to attend the course, titled *Iraq/US Great Debates Course 2018, East and West*. See Table 1 for participants' code names.

**Table 1:** Participants' code names.

US participants	Gender	Iraqi participants	Gender
AmrCN	M	IrWN	F
AmrDO	M	IrHH	F
AmrJC	M	IrFA	F
AmrTQ	M	IrAK	F
AmrJJ	M	IrHS	F
AmrAK	M	IrDA	F
AmrJS	M	IrZK	F
AmrCH	M	IrST	F
AmrSK	M	IrAJ	F
AmrCT	M	IrHM	M
AmrJG	M	IrFS	M
AmrMD	M	IrAA	M
AmrAA	M		
AmrTC	M		
AmrNG	M		
AmrCC	F		
AmrAKU	F		
AmrFA	F		
AmrKM	F		
AmrKB	F		
AmrMV	F		
AmrSH	F		
AmrJW	F		
AmrXK	F		
AmrSM	F		
AmrMA	F		
AmrTS	F		
AmrSS	F		

The Iraqi participants were twelve fourth-year undergraduates in the department of English at an Iraqi university, 22-24 years old. English as a foreign language formed almost 12 years of their education to date. Selection criteria were based on their English language proficiency and will to join in intercultural communications. The US participants were 28 students, mostly aged 18-20. Eight were white; four were Arab or Middle Eastern; five were Spanish; five were South Asian; two were African American; two were African; and two were Chinese. Ethical procedures were followed and permissions obtained; see Appendix B.

I conducted two recorded semi-structured group interviews with the Iraqi participants: before and after the course. The first (about 57 minutes) was in a study room in their department. The second (almost 84 minutes) was in my office. The interviews were in Arabic and English, the better for students to express what they had in mind. The first informed participants about the research aim; their role; the right to withdraw at any point; and the way their data would be recorded, transcribed and protected. They were offered time to ask about anything, presented with a short questionnaire about their interests and reasons for majoring in English, and given consent forms to sign. The same procedure was followed by my colleague with the participants from the US university. All participants were invited to be members of the closed Facebook group *Iraq/US Great Debates Course 2018, East and West*. Both my colleague and I monitored activity in the group.

The second interview covered participants' reflections on the course: linguistic and cultural challenges (if any) they experienced and how they managed to overcome their challenges, along with how much they valued the course and to what extent ELF was important to the course. As a moderator, I understood how important it was to suppress my own personal views, to collect an informative dataset (Morgan 1996). My colleague asked his students to submit reflection papers about the course.

Analysis involved a mixture of top-down coding based on the research aims and ICA model with bottom-up codes derived from the data. The incorporation of both the researcher's analysis of the Facebook exchanges and participants' own interpretations paved the way for emic and etic perspectives. Through triangulation of data sources, a rich picture of participants' intercultural experiences was built up (Miles et al. 2014, Schreier 2012). To ensure reliability, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness criteria were followed: the study codebook was shared with an expert for assessing inter-rater reliability.

### **3. The debate course**

The course lasted eight weeks. As an unassessed complement to other course modules, participants were expected to engage actively in debate as "training in intercultural awareness [that] can make the unknown seem a little less surprising" (Fries 2009: 11).

Both researchers did their best to create balanced groups in terms of shared interests, language competence and level of education (Hadavi 2004). Participants were divided into global teams of four participants each (two pro + two con, with mixed representation from Iraqis and Americans on both sides) to debate. Up to three additional American students joined as resource researchers or moderator; see Appendix A.

Students were required to choose the topics (two for each team) and organize into teams on the first day of class. They were asked to engage via asynchronous video recordings and synchronous video conferences throughout the course. Each team did two live debates, the first performed outside of class hours due to the time-zone difference. One topic from each group was selected to be studied for one week by the class as a whole, with the team that selected that issue leading discussion. All debates were recorded and posted in the closed Facebook group. On the final day of the course, each class produced a closing video of thanks and debriefing. A certificate of completion was issued to all students, certifying that the

student successfully completed the course, containing both university logos and signed by the professor.

It was important that students choose controversial topics related to sociopolitical practices, customs and lifestyles of the target cultures (Lázár et al. 2007). To avoid “dualism” (Tumposky 2004), participants were encouraged to argue among themselves. They were not expected to give one hundred percent agreement at any point. This was to avoid “the danger of culture being limited to the all-too-familiar stereotypical icons of the target culture [and] of believing that there is one authoritative account of another country and its cultures” (Byram et al. 2002: 11).

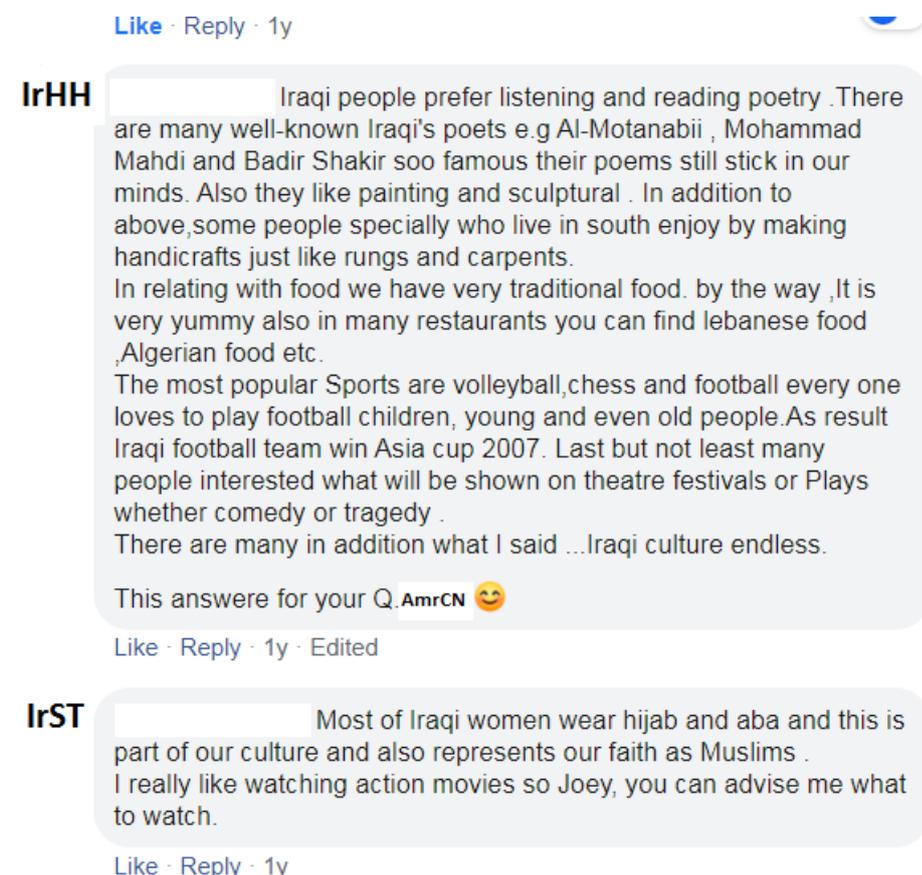
Participants were clearly informed about their roles in advance. Iraqi participants only were further required to first post their topics for debate on a separate closed Facebook group for the researcher to give his own feedback before being posted to their teams for the debate, as a kind of “preliminary debate” (Hadavi 2004).

## 4. Results

As a result of data analysis, I identified four themes: *self-other representation*, *ICA as multiple voices*, *feedback on the course*, and *ELF-related remarks*.

### 4.1 Self-other representation

Especially in the initial phases, self (re-)presentation via video conference enabled participants to familiarize themselves with each other’s hobbies, life experience, preferred cuisine, dress and social practices. See Figure 1 for a snippet of dialogue accompanying one such video conference.



**Figure 1:** A snippet of video-conference dialogue (Theme I).

IrHH and IrST introduce Iraqi culture as an endless and unsolidified entity. Their contribution served to break any sense of difference and build a bond of deference or even sameness.

**AmrCN:** I was surprised to hear these facts, especially the fact that Iraq is made up of many diverse cultures, since it made me realize that Iraq might not be much different than America after all.

Self-presentation in relation to the other proved an important step toward practicing intercultural debate through ELF. This helped them negotiate their first cultural frame of reference. My US colleague put it like this:

Without this [cultural artefact introductions], students don't get the fullest picture of the intercultural context for one another and thus it takes away from their ability to use English effectively. They would not create cohesive groups that could then solve their assigned tasks effectively and with depth.

#### 4.2 ICA as multiple voices

The course served as a platform for participants to learn through working together to address issues of global concern. Through live video conferencing, student-produced videos, and synchronous and asynchronous messaging, students became more inclined to have their multiple voices heard, ending up with a better understanding of one another's cultural views.

Participants' feelings were so clear debating poverty with reference to education and how governmental bodies were, in their view, responsible. Figures 2 and 3 show comments from two students. Group 4 came to the conclusion that poverty was the primary cause for terrorism.

AmrDO shared a link. \*\*\*

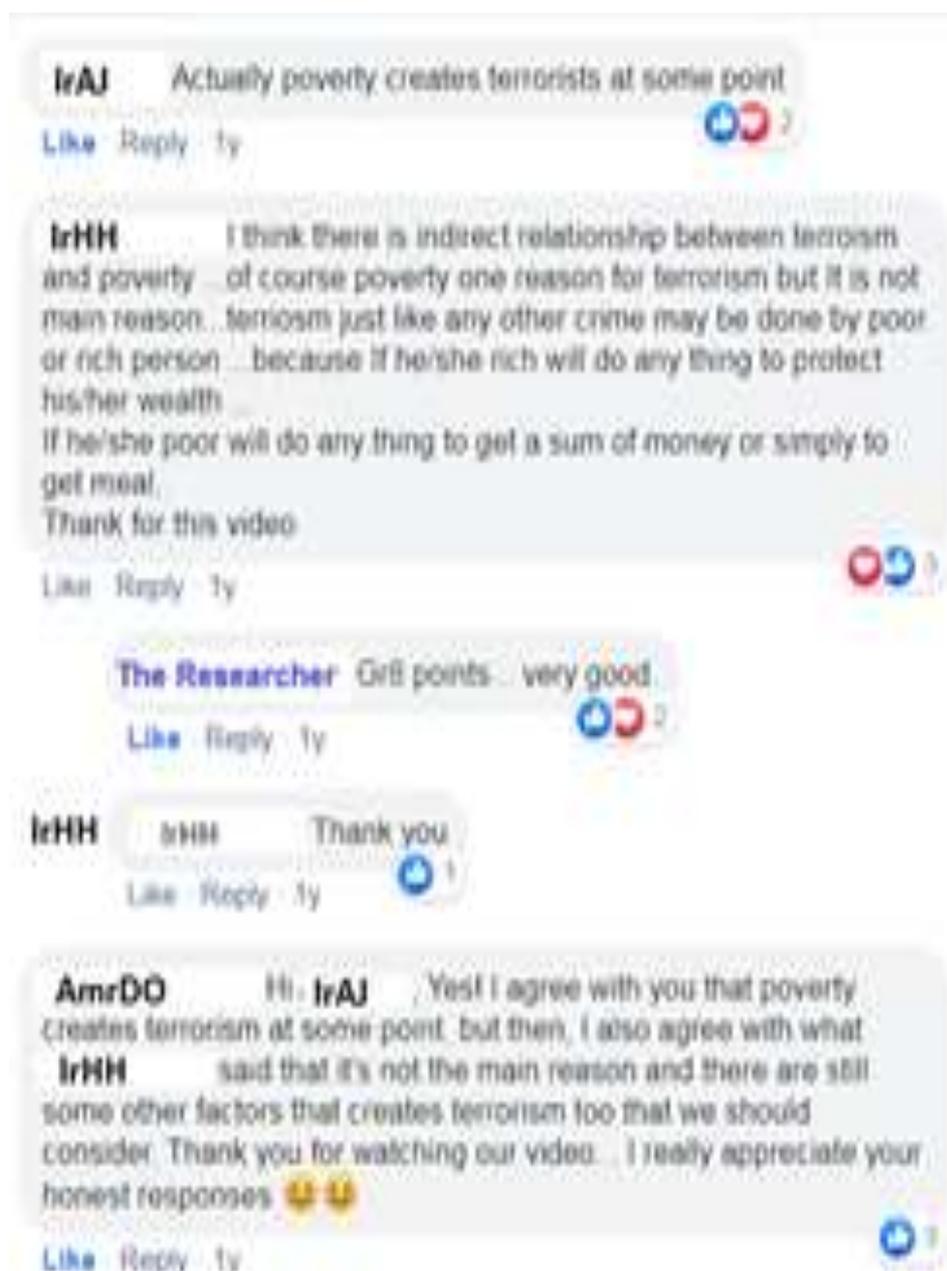
14 April 2018 · Seattle, WA, United States

Sorry for the late post (was absent last Wednesday): this is my chosen article regarding the reasons why I am a con about poverty is not the root of terrorism. I was actually surprised and intrigued on how the way this article talks about extremism and it mentions about most prominent terrorists in al-Qaeda and its various affiliates have been engineers, doctors, or successful businessmen. Also, I want to hear what are your thoughts when the British Prime Minister, David Cameron quoted: "Now let me be clear, I am not saying these issues aren't important. But we mustn't delude ourselves. We could deal with all these issues, and some people in our country and elsewhere would still be drawn to Islamist extremism. No, we must be clear, he said. "The root cause of the threat we face is the extremist ideology itself."

I do want to hear your honest thoughts/opinions regarding this article 😊



**Figure 2:** Group 4 student linking terrorism to poverty.



**Figure 3:** Students discussing poverty's connection to terrorism (snippet 1).

**IrHS** **IrHS** we all have our own point of view on that sub ..... the poverty is one of the secondary reasons for terrorism cause if u r poor ..... and u may don't have insurance or any thing and someone offered a lot of money that u can feed ur family from, for doing certain terror mission and u literally don't have any other way u somehow would accept it (some ppl ). in addition to other reasons .

Like · Reply · 1y



**Collaborator** Yes, **IrHS** , I can imagine how someone could feel that desperate and feel it is the only way to feed and support their family...but what an awful dilemma to feel you have no way out but that way....

Like · Reply · 1y



**AmrDO** **AmrDO** I completely agree with you Mr. Tuke and **IrHS** . I was from the Philippines where one of it's region's city was conquered by the terrorists who were fighting against the government and their main motive I believe is to get the whole city and make it as an independent city and I think one of the reasons is poverty and because of the government failures too... that was just last year and I was aware how awful it was for the people on that city, called Marawi. It caused so much destruction of properties, innocent lives being taken away and fear to the people.

Like · Reply · 1y



**AmrDO** it was an awful dilemma 🙄

Like · Reply · 1y



**IrHS** **IrHS** yeahhh**Collaborator** definitely they say that life has it's ups and downs but some ppl live only in downs mood of life that y there is no country ever can omit the poverty percentage from their economic statistics and at last they r the victim of "revolution of economy " in way or another .

Like · Reply · 1y

**Figure 4:** Debating poverty (snippet 2).

- IrMK** [IrMK](#) Hi guys 🙌.  
I agree with you all.  
Poverty is hard and makes the people who suffering from it does a lots of illegal things and they will be criminals and robbers.  
So, the governments should control on it .  
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1y
- AmrMV** [AmrMV](#) Hello, [IrAJ](#)  
I agree with you as well. I believe poverty does create terrorism at some point but [IrHH](#) what would be another reason that creates poverty? I completely agree with you, I just never thought of it with rich people. I always believed that poor people will do this types of terrorism attack to get money and to help out their family. You made a great point with wealthy people. But I wonder if there's something else that is the reason for terrorism attacks?  
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1y  2
- IrHH** [IrHH](#) I think people who do not have chance to be education or even they have chance to educate but in bad way they put in their mind bad thing...  
Or may be Could be personal reason I mean the person himself do not like see other live happily his heart full of malice those not like peace they just like blood shed etc.. [AmrMV](#)  
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1y  1
- IrHS** [IrHS](#) well there is a lot of Qs but I think that Singapore have the ability to eliminate poverty percentage from their statistics cause it Has been able to achieve economic development through the effectiveness of education and foreign investment through it's Free capitalist economy . by the way any country can do it by Sustainable economic development . I did some researches with my uncle he is prof . in economy and management college . [Collaborator](#)  
[Love](#) · [Reply](#) · 1y  1

**Figure 5:** Debating poverty (snippet 3).

A turning point came in the debate over political corruption where all felt alienated from their respective governments, forging a sense of solidarity.

AmrCN

shared a link.

...

9 May 2018

My current event this week is a video regarding the upcoming parliamentary elections in Iraq. This video discusses various prominent issues, with a specific focus on the corruption in politics over the last decade and a half. This is an important topic to cover because the elections are this Saturday (the 12th) and will impact the lives of every Iraqi citizen for years to come. Eliminating corruption and electing honest and proactive politicians will be extremely beneficial for the Country as a whole.



ALJAZEERA.COM

## Iraq corruption watchdog: \$320bn stolen over 15 years

Will the new prime minister be able to tackle corruption and make a fresh...

**Figure 6:** Debating political corruption (snippet 1).

**IrFS** **IrFS** Same faces every single elections, faking elections, stolen billions, corruption and many other problems. The problem is that those faces won't be changed just because they have some sort of mini armies aka mafias so even if someone new would run for elections and wins he won't be able to do anything cuz his superior is a corrupted politician 😏

Like · Reply · 1y

**IrHM** **IrHM** Iraq has a lot of corrupted faces that could be effective on the new face to bound him to never do his job faithfully

Like · Reply · 1y

**Collaborator** Do you see any elements of corruption in the US system, **AmrCN** or **IrFS** or **IrHM**? And if so, what would you propose to do about it that would be effective?

Like · Reply · 1y



**IrHM** **IrHM** <https://www.theguardian.com/.../anti-corruption-summit-us...> this is the answer dr. Greg Tuke



THEGUARDIAN.COM

To end corruption, start with the US and UK. They allow it in broad daylight |...

Like · Reply · 1y

**Figure 7:** Debating political corruption (snippet 2).

**IrFS**

**IrFS** Yes there's corruption everywhere and as for the u.s there are 2 types of corruption the first is political represented by the Republican party and the second is social corruption represented by drugs guns being easily accessed by approximately most of the american society and when it comes to guns ... well that's that's a whole long story

Like · Reply · 1y

**AmrTC**

**AmrTC** Thank you **AmrCN** for sharing this post. I specifically was intrigued by the part that was talking about the jets and how the iraqi government paid 32 times more for them than what they should have been priced for. This leads me to think that the ones who are making these deals and approving them might be the exact people who are doing it for their own advantage, which is personal wealth. Do you agree? or have a different perspective?

Like · Reply · 1y

**Figure 8:** Debating political corruption (snippet 3).

Students had a similar coming together in considering terrorism as part of an extremist ideology, not of Islam (figures 6-8). Some participants ended up changing their minds. In both cases (figures 4-5, 6-8), participants reflected conceptual change from a starting point of defining self at the national level to one of doing so at the global level (Wolf 2014). This was clear from one Iraqi student's comment that "it was so important for me to let the world know that we all share the same place and threat of ISIS" (my translation from the Arabic). On Facebook, AmrTC commented that "Islam is not the same as terrorism, cannot put it all to Islam...".

**AmrSM**

shared a link.

...

29 April 2018

I choose this article as my current event because it discusses the school systems in Iraq w/ and w/o ISIS. I think this is a good article because it talks about how ISIS uses students as fighters instead of letting them continue on with their education. "A math textbook, for example, asked students in one exercise to calculate the number of "unbelievers" who could be killed by a car bomber. Another referenced how many explosives a factory could produce. All plus signs were removed because they resemble the Christian cross." I think this quote was very powerful because since ISIS claims to be a "religious" group (which they aren't AT ALL) try take over students learning by feeding into their minds that they must learn about explosives and killing people instead of real subjects they need to learn about like math and science. I think this article will support the Con side of our debate topic which is Is the best education system one that favors the smartest among us? because some people don't have the power of further continuing their education because of terrorist groups like these who don't allow them to learn what they should be learning.



**Figure 9:** Debating terrorism in Iraq (snippet 1).

**AmrSM** sorry if it sounds like I'm going off lol ISIS is just hella janxy to these poor innocent students who have everything to lose because they wanna blow up everything. ...

Like · Reply · 1y  1

**AmrTS** hella janxy

Like · Reply · 1y  1

**IrST** I agree with you! That is insane i can't believe there doing this to innocent kids who just go to school and learn to get there education! These students don't have the right to be treated like that at all. But, do you think they have to go to ISIS schools like do you think they do any homeschooling's instead?

Like · Reply · 1y

**IrHH** Hello **IrST**  
As I am Iraqi girl so I can answer about your Question. ISIS did not ask students whether they like studying in their school or not. The studying at ISIS school was obligatory. The process just like someone stands at a door of your house and asks you whether study at my school and my religion as well as my thoughts or I Kill you? what do you choose of course you choose to save your life so the same thing happening with them. For that reason after Iraqi army achieved victory found many children suffering from psychology ills.

Like · Reply · 1y · Edited

**AmrTS** Reading this is actually mind blowing that events like this happen. Comparing to the school system that I grew up going it makes me feel bad for skipping/not enjoying it when there are students who don't even have access to school. It gives me a whole new perspective on education.

Like · Reply · 1y  1

**Figure 10:** Debating terrorism in Iraq (snippet 2).

**AmrTC** Thank you **AmrSM** for sharing this post with me. I too, specifically liked the quote you picked out from the article, and would like to add that right after your quote it states, "Parents were quite afraid of sending their kids to the (ISIS) schools," Ibarra Sanchez said. "Sometimes they were forced to." After reading your quote and adding this one in, I feel like I now know how ISIS recruits young kids, and that is by brainwashing them. I was honestly surprised to read these quotes presented, since I had assumed ISIS terrorists did their acts out of sacrifice for their religion. But after reading this article, it is clear many of these terrorists are brainwashed. For this reason, "Do you think it would be fair to give young ISIS terrorists, who have survived bombings or terrorist acts, a second chance at straightening up their life?" Since at the end of the day, they may have been brainwashed into doing the acts they did, and since they might have been forced to go to a school where ISIS manipulated the topics and the things they learned.

Like · Reply · 1y



**IrHH** When ISIS came to Iraq change every thing into black side .this good article to discuss this important subject i wanna to add something ISIS also established or printed new books related with their religion and learning student how to make explosives how to be good kamikaze also use guns through the education .But each things finish when Iraqi army achieved victory against ISIS and now every thing is normal 😊

Like · Reply · 1y



**AmrMV** Hi **IrHH** ,  
Are you saying that now student aren't taken over by ISIS?

Like · Reply · 1y

**Figure 11:** Debating terrorism in Iraq (snippet 3).

**IrHH** Look,ISIS dominated about four cities in Iraq (Mousil,Anbar,Salah Aldeen and Karkuk)Not about whole Iraq so in these cities ISIS changed educational system to the black side .Now after victory against them government does hard work to reform education of course by helping from other countries and organization such as UNESCO ,UNICEF and red crescent .ISIS destoryed school building so that some students get learning in Camps 😞 ISIS also burnings the scientific books . I hope in future will be better educational system for students in my country 😊

Like · Reply · 1y · Edited

**IrHH** **AmrCN**

Like · Reply · 1y

**Greg Tuke** **IrHH** This is so helpful to get your thoughts on this. Is the US role in terms of its impact on Northern Iraq generally a positive one? My experience for the brief time (one week) that I was in northern Iraq in 2009 with an NGO, was that the US was generally seen in a positive light in Northern Iraq (especially among Kurds), but seen far more negatively in and around Bagdad where your school is located.

Like · Reply · 1y

**AmrMV** I appreciate you sharing this post with us! Before reading this I didn't know what these poor students did. This is honestly not okay. I believe that every kid should get an education and not go out and fight.

Like · Reply · 1y



**Figure 12:** Debating terrorism in Iraq (snippet 4).

Iraqi participants divided on the question of Muqtada al-Sadr as a representative figure of (their) Shiite society.

**IrFS:** We need no more debates about religion... we [are] fed up.

**IrHS:** Debating topics related to religion and its figures like that of Muqtada al-Sadr is like [an] area which takes us nowhere.

**IrHM:** Religious figures [like Muqtada] are undebatable names.... They are part of who you are.

They were further divided in debating the Gulf coalition against Yemen in relation to what they saw as a Saudi-Iran proxy war, with its effect on Iraq (figures 13-17).

← Iraq/US Great Debates ccourse 20... 

**AmrCN** shared a link to the group: **Iraq/US Great Debates ccourse 2018.** ...

11 April at 22:41 · 

I chose two articles for my current event. They are both talking about a visit from an Iraqi political figure to Saudi Arabia to try to diffuse the feud between Iran and Saudi Arabia. One article details the U.S perspective, the other shows the meeting from an Iraqi perspective. I was interested in this event because my colleague **IrHM** was explaining how peaceful the Iraqis can be and this is a prime example.

<https://www.the-american-interest.com/2017/08/01/saudi-arabia-welcomes-muqtada-al-sadr/>

<https://www.iraqinews.com/baghdad-politics/al-sadr-says-ready-to-mediate-for-better-saudi-iran-relations/>



THE-AMERICAN-INTEREST.COM  
**Saudi Arabia Welcomes Muqtada al-Sadr**  
 Saudi Arabia is seeking rapprochement with Iraq, but is shaking hands ...

 **You, Culture Lang and 3 others**

**Figure 13:** Debating religion and politics (snippet 1).

**AmrSK** that is very interesting, to get two different perspectives and see these important things from a side we don't really know very well can clear a lot of views.

Like · Reply · 1y

**AmrJG** I think including both views is important because it allows us to compare U.S. and Iraqi perspective.

Like · Reply · 1y

**AmrSM** I think this could be useful for our arguments whether it's pro or con because we have both sides/perspectives that can help us have stronger arguments

Like · Reply · 1y

**Figure 14:** Debating religion and politics (snippet 2).

**IrHM** Muqtada al-Sadr's meeting in KSA was preceded by this good news for Iraq, bad news for Iran: "The Popular Mobilization Units are divided into two rival groups, with some wanting to join the Iraqi army and others wanting to remain independent." Author Hamdi Malik Posted August 4, 2017

<http://www.al-monitor.com/p...>

"In a remarkable shift of events, the Iraqi Ministry of Defense added on July 20 a number of Al-Abbas Combat Division troops to its ranks following Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's approval, thus making the brigade the first Shiite faction in the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) to partially join the Iraqi regular forces. [Al-Abbas Combat Div has supreme religious authority Ali al-Sistani's blessing] ...

Saraya al-Salam is moving in a similar direction, and the commanders of this brigade emphasized the importance of strengthening the Iraqi military institutions. Saraya al-Salam is an armed faction affiliated with Muqtada al-Sadr, who has repeatedly warned against the dangers of Shiite factions undermining state institutions. ...

Commenting on the efforts of Saraya al-Salam to preserve the Iraqi identity of its forces, spokesman for the Sadrist movement Salah al-Obeidi said in a TV interview July 17, "We [Sayyid al-Kunin Academy] invested in purely Iraqi talents. ... We did not send our members to foreign countries." ..."

[Iraqi nationalism, circa 2017, possibly overcoming the ultimate Identity Group divide: Shi'a v Sunni. I wonder how the Al-Abbas Combat Division got so well trained and organized. Certainly makes this Bernard post seem a distraction from reality. The Saudi meeting was a 'blessing', Iraq was already working well on healing the sectarian divide, restoring Iraqi's military. TeamTrump had been working on this, peeling the PMU away from Iran, with PM al-Abadi from day 1

**Figure 15:** Debating religion and politics (snippet 3).

**AmrAA** Is the proxy war in the Middle East between Iran and Saudi Arabia visible in Iraq? If so who do you guys feel your country should ally with. There have been many negative reports recently on Saudi Arabia and its air bombings in Yemen. What are you guys overall view on Saudi Arabia or Iran

Like · Reply · 1y



**IrHM** **AmrAA** the two countries searching for their benefits even though their benefits diplomatic or non-diplomatic no one's searching for yemen peace at all

Like · Reply · 1y

**Collaborator** **AmrAA** This is such a good question to explore. Do you have a current opinion on the questions you have offered here as well? It seems like the US often goes into these situations without a full understanding of the complexities of the relationships in Iraq, and between the major actors there; Saudis and Iran. I am really glad to see you are all exploring this to learn more.

Like · Reply · 1y

**AmrAA** I actually don't support the actions of Saudi Arabia which gets most of its military equipment from the United States I find it interesting how they were never in the Muslim ban list. I speculate this is because of their business ties with America. I believe the proxy war between Iran and Saudi is childish and embarrassing. The United States should quit arming a country that will go to any extent to get what it wants

Like · Reply · 1y

**Figure 16:** Debating religion and politics (snippet 4).

**Collaborator** AmrCN I really like that you have posed two articles with different perspectives here. Its interesting to me that you viewed this as an example of Iraqis acting peacefully. It is so hard sometimes to know the complex motivations of someone, yet so important sometimes. Is Sadr acting out of a desire for peace or for seeking more power, or some combination? And does it matter that we know his motivation, what do you think?

Like · Reply · 1y

**IrHM** The matter is that we are a peaceful people even Sadr they are more peace than the most of the people but you can note many snakes creeping for their benefits even if they allowed to show the peace face but the are still a yellow snakes it can poison any one that became non-useful for its benefits

Like · Reply · 1y

**Collaborator** I appreciate the sentiment, IrHM . We too, have snakes in the US political system, but also some really committed decent folks as well. It has been said that ... "Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others. "

Like · Reply · 1y



**Figure 17:** Debating religion and politics (snippet 5).

As per Baker (2011), this discussion illustrates how a point of disagreement in intercultural communication can serve to reveal participants' core beliefs. IrHM's reference to "yellow snakes" is as a symbol that potentially stands for the coalition forces gathered against Iraq in 2003 or the Gulf coalition led by Saudi Arabia against Yemen.

#### 4.3 Feedback on the course

Participants shared their positive experiences getting to know more about and accept others' viewpoints as part of intercultural communication.

**AmrAA [feedback post, 25 April 2018]:** One of the most important skills I learned in this class is being able to be open minded to other people even if you disagree with what they say. Prior to this class, I would be enraged if I hear someone say something that I thought was wrong or against my values, but know [sic] I understand not everyone grew up the same so different experiences affect people differently and lead to different views.

**AmrJW [feedback post, 25 April 2018]:** I never thought I would have this contact with someone in another country. It was really cool being able to learn about their culture and compare it to here in the US.

**AmrAA [feedback post, 25 April 2018]:** P. something new I learned during this debate is not to trust everything you've heard and never experienced yourself. I. when one of

my counter parts from Iraq explained that he also agrees that nuclearization is helpful he talked about if Iraq had nuclear weapons it never would have gotten invaded and wouldn't be where its [sic] at right now. E. listening to all the news from the west they acted like all of Iraqs [sic] citizens supported the invasion and the occupation of Iraq. But after my debate I learned that Iraqs [sic] people didn't support the invasion of their country and disrupted and hurt their country more than it helped

Such evaluative stances explain how intercultural debates help shape the interactive relationship between individuals' conceptual level and practice. This extends to understanding others' different views toward religion, as in IrWN's interview comment:

**IrWN:** This course was an opportunity to think of even my Sunni relatives, I am Shiite, before this I used to keep myself in the room when they visit us... now I regret this very much.... I am now happy with anyone... we are all human beings.

In the interviews, the Iraqi participants expressed their experience of the course as a welcome addition to their classroom-based language learning, learning to question critically issues representing the core of their daily lives.

**IrAK:** I can now see how it would be possible to live sharing our different perspectives about religion, politics, marriage... but still there is something personal everyone should respect.

#### 4.4 ELF-related remarks

In their pre-course interview, the Iraqi participants expressed consensus regarding English as “the only and best means” for them to learn more about the world. The importance of English for communication with neighboring countries like Turkey and Iran – to some extent with Kurds in the north of Iraq – and, most importantly, as the only language chosen to work in parallel with Arabic at all levels of education were all motivations identified. To become a teacher of English and the expected status attributed to that in Iraq was a further important factor. Practicing their English with native speakers and knowing more about the US were the main reasons for participation in the course. Descriptions like “ideal”, “correct”, “pure”, “RP” [received pronunciation] and “standard” English all emerged in the interview, attributable to their teaching materials: e.g., O'Connor (1980), Stageberg (1965) and Quirk et al. (2008).

In the post-course interview, the Iraqi participants' views were more geared toward ELF than Anglophone norms:

**IrDA [Facebook comment, 25 April 2018]:** [I was afraid of videoing myself or writing mmm... no but mainly because I think my English is not good but I felt they [the Americans] can understand me in debate.... I was encouraged to do I feel sometimes cannot understand them.

The American participants expressed similar feelings and concerns about working with the Iraqi students for whom English was not their mother tongue.

**AmrJW [Facebook comment, 25 April 2018]:** At first, I was very nervous to start this because I did not know how it was going to be like having to communicate and work with people who do not have English as their primary language, but it was not a problem. There were some confusions as we would talk, but it really was not a lot and easily resolved.

**AmrTC [Facebook comment, 25 April 2018]:** Besides for being challenged with technical difficulties, there were some troubles with communication, as English is IrAK

and Ir FA's second language on the Iraqi side. However, this problem of communication I feel strengthened our relationship as a team, since it forced us to talk more back and forth. Not only that, but it forced me to learn the importance of body language.

My US collaborator wrote an email summarizing this experience:

I was particularly pleased with how our students worked to understand group dynamics as well, so as to get their global group to function at a higher level... and many commented on their improved skills in better understanding group dynamics in a problem-solving global team by the end of the class.

Overall, I was very pleased with how the Great Debates format helped students in both countries to go beyond just using the English language better in a debate format, but in understanding issues and how they might play out in different cultures, and to then find supporting evidence to be persuasive. Clearly, for nearly all of the students in both classes, I felt their cross-cultural communication skills were significantly enhanced by this experience in just 8 weeks of work together.

## 5. Discussion

The course helped participants move from a traditional view of “my culture” vs. “their culture” by using the tools of ELF. Baker's (2011) ICA model with its three levels served as framework for understanding participants' knowledge, skills, and attitudes. As in Baker's model, participants moved from a basic understanding just of their own culture to a ‘self and other’ understanding appropriate to intercultural communication. This was clearly represented in how Group 3 addressed their first topic, *country culture: what is a superior culture* (see Appendix A).

The ICA-oriented tasks used in this study enabled participants to develop trust within their groups and bond based on their self-other understanding, allowing them to work together effectively to come up with strong debates and complete their assignments. They felt accountable to one another and were motivated to come through for each other.

In answering the first research question (“what are participants’ views of the Facebook-based debate course they attended?”), one finds clear indication that the course helped students deepened their discourses, comment critically on a range of ICA-oriented topics, and so recognize how “multiple voices or perspectives within any cultural grouping” echo “the relative nature of cultural norms” and the way that cultural understanding is “provisional and open to revision” (Baker 2012: 66). The course demonstrates how relatively easy and informative it is to engage students in intercultural communication via ELF. Facebook has served as an ideal platform for participants to scaffold their critical stance and linguacultural knowledge through learning from and knowing about each other. The positive feedback from participants during and after the course confirms this.

The course demonstrated that being an effective communicator in English is more valuable than having native fluency. An effective communicator is one who understands intercultural communication “in a manner that goes both beyond the national and fixed ‘target’ community [and recognizes] the pluralism of communicative practices associated with ELF” (Baker 2011: 211). Through ELF, participants conformed to the norms of no particular community but their own, created for the course.

The answer to the second research question (“what are participants’ perceptions of ELF in relation to the course?”) is that ELF has been recognized as a productive tool to respond to group dynamics within a community of practice. At the onset, it was foreign to all the participants from both countries. Participants not just expected but experienced intelligibility-

related issues; but, nevertheless, they learned to work together, accommodating each other's English.

## 6. Conclusion

This work contributes to the field of intercultural communication and ELF via its account of a Facebook-based university course. It paves the way for teachers to include the (inter)cultural dimension as an inevitable part of their instructional practice in English-language teaching. In the present study, Iraqi students learned to move away from their comfort zone of dominant discourse regarding (say) Arab language, history and culture, into acknowledging their fellow participants' valuable contributions and different perspectives: a point that is surely applicable in many other contexts.

By the end of the eight-week course, students demonstrated an obvious shift in views from basic to advanced cultural awareness. Almost all participants managed to put their understanding of cultural differences aside and embrace the fluid nature of culture and cultural exchange.

Generalizable results were not the aim in this research, which was limited in terms of number of participants, context and time available for the (unassessed) course. In the end, it is hard to be certain of the extent to which participants developed their intercultural awareness via ELF. That said, the results do sit well with those of other studies in the area (e.g., Yu & Maele 2018, Kusumaningputri & Widodo 2018).

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## About the author



Sami Alhasnawi did his PhD at the University of Southampton, UK, and was a postdoctoral fellow at Hacettepe University in Turkey and a DAAD research fellow at the University of Potsdam, Germany. He is now assistant professor at the University of Al-Qadisiyah in Iraq. His research focuses on sociolinguistics, bi-/multilingualism, multimodality, (trans-)semiotics, English as a lingua franca, English as a medium of instruction, genre-/register-based studies, teacher education, intercultural communication and cultural linguistics.

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## Appendix A: Groups and topics

### Group 1

**Iraq:** IrAK, IrFA

**US:** AmrTS, AmrSS, AmrMA, AmrKM, AmrAKU

#### Topics

1. World economics: do the wealthiest countries conspire to harm the weaker economies? **Resolved:** that the world economy is a conspiracy, largely led by the US and European forces, designed to weaken developing countries like Iraq.
2. Country culture: how best is household finance managed? **Resolved:** if you live with your parents, the control of finances should rest with the elder father of the household.

### Group 2

**Iraq:** IrHS, IrDA

**US:** IrST, AmrJJ, AmrTQ, AmrTC, AmrFA

#### Topics

1. Immigration: are highly restrictive immigration policies beneficial to the world? **Resolved:** that the US should tightly restrict immigration policies, particularly from Muslim-dominant countries, to enhance security.
2. Animal rights: should animals be more protected from human consumption? **Resolved:** due to the threat posed to our planet, meat consumption should be dramatically reduced worldwide.

### Group 3

**Iraq:** IrHM, IrAJ

**US:** AmrCN, AmrSM, AmrJG, AmrSK, AmrCH

#### Topics

1. Country culture: what is a superior culture? **Resolved:** that the Iraqi economic, political and cultural system is, on balance, superior to the US.
2. Free education: is the best educational system the one that favors the smartest among us? **Resolved:** that all universities in the US and Iraq should provide free university education, but only to those students scoring in the top 40% on entrance exams – to ensure the highest quality education, regardless of diversity goals.

### Group 4

**Iraq:** IrHH, IrWN

**US:** AmrNG, AmrMV, AmrCT, AmrDO, AmrTC

#### Topics

1. Poverty and terrorism: what is the primary cause of terrorism? **Resolved:** poverty is the primary cause of terrorism.
2. Religion and freedom of expression: how is religious criticism best handled in developing democratic societies? **Resolved:** that criticism of religious practices is part of the freedom of expression.

**Group 5****Iraq:** IrZK, IrST**US:** AmrJW, AmrXK, AmrSH, AmrCC**Topics**

1. Democracy: is sometimes less of it more? **Resolved:** that nations must sometimes choose to act less democratically in order ultimately to become more democratic.
2. School uniforms: what is the overall impact of school uniforms on learning? **Resolved:** that mandatory school uniforms promote equality and diminish the importance of economic difference among students and should be promoted as good school policy.

**Group 6****Iraq:** IrAA, IrFS**US:** AmrMD, AmrJS, AmrKB, AmrAK, AmrAA**Topics**

1. Possession of nuclear weapons: who should own nuclear weapons to ensure the best world order? **Resolved:** that all countries should have the right to possess nuclear weapons just as the five veto countries do.
2. Institution of marriage: compare perspective between Iraq and the United States. **Resolved:** we ensure stronger family bonds and better results when the parents determine who their daughters are allowed to marry.

## Appendix B: Consent form

College of Education  
Department of English

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### Consent Form

Study Title: **A Facebook-based debate through English as a Lingua Franca (ELF):  
A move toward intercultural awareness for a world of differences**

Researcher Name:

Please initial the boxes if you agree with the statement(s)

I have read and understood the information concerning  
this study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.



I agree to take part in this research project and agree my data  
to be used for the purpose of this study.



I understand that I can withdraw from the study without consequence at  
any time simply by informing the researcher of my decision.



Data Protection

I understand that my information collected about during my participation in this study will be  
stored on a password-protected computer and that this information will only be used for the  
purpose of the study. All files containing any personal data will be made anonymous.

Name of the participant

Signature



Date:

20-12-2018