THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

A thematic linguistic analysis of TESOL students' commitment to intercultural communication values

OPEN ACCESS

A thematic linguistic analysis of TESOL students' commitment to intercultural communication values

TESOL teacher educators may recognise that simple observation of interaction in workshop discussions does not show exactly which intercultural communication (IC) values student-teachers have taken on board and how committed they are to them. This article describes a study of TESOL student-teacher journals that used a thematic linguistic framework of analysis aimed at revealing the extent of their commitment to IC values, as evidenced by their attitude to cultural differences and stereotyping, and their stance markers.

The student-teachers in the study were taking a ten-week 'Text and Discourse for Language Teaching' option course, in a UK MSc TESOL program. This course encourages students to critically compare pragmatics traditions of Speech Act Theory (exploring social functions of language), Exchange Structure (examining initiation, response and follow-up acts), Conversation Analysis (describing patterns in talk-in-interaction), Cooperative Principle (examining how informative, truthful, relevant, and clear utterances are), Politeness Theories (studying face-saving strategies) and Critical Discourse Analysis (showing how power relations are reinforced through language use). Throughout the course, the classes question the extent to which the social functions, patterns, maxims and strategies described in these pragmatics traditions by UK and US linguists can be generalized to other cultures; IC values and intercultural pragmatics are discussed throughout the course.

After each of the weekly workshops, in the year of the study, the students were invited by their lecturer to write journals, as a voluntary non-assessed activity, guided by the broad instruction: "Just to carry on thinking about today's pragmatics tradition, write anything that occurs to you on how the principles and maxims apply or do not apply to another culture that you know". This was a class task: the lecturer explained that the

A thematic linguistic analysis of IC

pedagogic rationale was to encourage critical exploration of the worldwide applicability of

the UK/US-centred traditions by drawing on their own experience. Students were not invited

at any point to evaluate cultural values of any social group. Six months after the course, the

lecturer analysed the journals: the research rationale was to determine to what extent their

writing showed commitment to IC values. The study did not attempt to discover whether

there was a causal relationship between the course and the findings.

It is hoped that the article will demonstrate to teacher educators how thematic

linguistic analysis of student-teachers' use of language can reveal the depth of their

understanding of IC values. The framework of analysis is transferable to other TESOL

contexts, and the results of that analysis could guide curriculum design.

LITERATURE OVERVIEW

Educating Teachers about Intercultural Communication and Stereotyping

IC competence is generally seen as the ability to communicate and behave effectively

and appropriately in intercultural exchanges and also to handle the psychological demands

and dynamic outcomes that result from such exchanges (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009).

Byram (1997) identified five IC competence *savoirs*. Three of them relate to knowledge and

skills at the basis of interaction: knowledge of one's own culture and the interlocutor's

culture (*savoir*), skills of interpreting a document or event from another culture *(savoir

comprendre),*and the ability to acquire knowledge of another culture, (*savoir apprendre*).

However, it is the other two *savoirs* that are particularly relevant to the current study because

they both contain an element of comparison and evaluation.

The first of these (*savoir être*) relates to attitudes towards other and self. *Savoir être*

refers to the valuing of the interlocutor's culture and the relativizing of one's own. Byram

(1997) claims that for successful intercultural interaction, attitudes need to be not simply positive but ones "of curiosity and openness", with a readiness to suspend disbelief and judgement with respect to others' meanings, beliefs and behaviours", and "suspend belief in one's own meanings and behaviours, and to analyse them from the viewpoint of the others with whom one is engaging (ibid, p.34). This is otherwise known as "decentering", or the willingness not to assume that one's own values, beliefs and behaviours are the naturally correct ones, and a willingness to "see how they might look from an outsider's perspective who has a different set of values, beliefs and behaviours" (Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, 2002). The fifth *savoir* is *savoir s'engager*, that of having a disposition to interact "vigorously and critically with knowledge and experience" (Byram, 1997, p.90). Byram calls this "critical cultural awareness", defining it as "an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries" (ibid, p.53), making the ideological basis of judgements explicit with a clearly articulated set of beliefs (ibid).

Byram (1997) has been seen as essentialist, explaining people's behaviour as the essence of their culture, and suggesting that all people from one culture will behave in one way (Holliday, 2013), and as culturalist, writing of cultures as if they were separate entities with stable characteristics distinct from other cultures (Holliday, Kullman & Hyde, 2010). In IC theory, there has been a move to a non-essentialist view, which takes into account the complexity of people's cultural identity. Holliday et al (2010) see culture as a social force associated with values, appreciating cultures and attributes as complex multi-layered multi-faceted entities flowing and intermingling regardless of national frontiers. They hold that culturalism leads to otherization: imagining someone as different to 'us' and excluding 'them' from 'our' 'normal', 'superior' and 'civilised' group".

However, Byram (1997, p.34) recognized these consequences of culturalism: "attitudes towards people who are perceived as different in respect of the cultural meanings, beliefs and behaviours they exhibit /…/ are frequently characterised as prejudice or stereotype". Components of his model can be used by researchers with a non-culturalist ethos. The study described in this article used his *savoir être* and *savoir s'engager* components because they provided a practical framework for analysing whether student-teachers were oriented to IC values of decentering, critical cultural awareness etc. The study also contained a category relating to Holliday's non-essentialist approach, to analyse whether they saw culture as multi-layered and multi-faceted. The combined approaches allowed for a study of non-orientation to IC values, in the form of otherization and stereotyping.

A stereotype is a generalized belief about a group and its members, an ideal characterization of the foreign Other (Holliday et al, 2010) and a "conventional, formulaic and over-simplified conception, opinion or image" (Smirnova, 2013, p.488). Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009) observe that stereotyping implies attributing characteristics to all members of a group. These characteristics, which can be the physical aspect, interests, occupations, ethnicities, behaviour and abilities, arise from having general knowledge about or experience of the group. Stereotyping can be positive when the characteristics of the group are respected or negative when they are disrespected.

Some scholars hold that stereotyping is a result of the normal process of making sense of the world, calling it a natural mechanism to help to understand "foreign cultures" (Holliday et al, 2017), "a common human practice underlying the impulse to create order in response to the fear of cognitive and emotional internal chaos" (Vief-Schmidt, 2013, p.152), and a way to simplify an otherwise complex world so that people can make assumptions about others that "oil the wheels of social interaction and are unlikely to be challenged" (Abrams, 2010, p.20). On the other hand, stereotyping underestimates "considerable intra-

group differences and diversity while overestimating presumed differences between in-group and out-group" (Vief-Schmidt, 2013, p.153). Treating group members as having invariable properties does not acknowledge exceptions to its general rules (Scollon, Scollon & Jones, 2012) and it can blind people to equally important aspects of a person's character or behaviour. Dovidio, Brigham, Johnson and Gaertner (1996) see stereotyping as a result of faulty-thought processes, factual incorrectness, inordinate rigidity and inappropriate attributions from a negative attitude or discriminatory behaviour. It is fundamental that stereotyping is addressed in teaching since it poses an obstacle to objective viewing and acceptance of difference and it can be a barrier to IC (Gut, Wilczewski & Gorbaniuk, 2017).

Prejudice differs from stereotyping in that it is concerned with negative evaluations of the group itself, and resulting in a rejection of the group. It is a "bias which devalues people because of their perceived membership of a social group and which is potentially harmful and consequential" because it reduces "the standing or value attached to a person through their group membership" (Abrams, 2010, pp.8-9). Prejudice tends to be a preconceived opinion based not usually on knowledge and experience but on "prior formulae of Self and Other representation" (Holliday, 2013, p.172). It can be involved in nationalism, racism and sexism, which are anathema to IC.

Student-teachers in TESOL education programmes need to be made aware of IC, so as to help their learners recognize "how the language they produce is perceived and interpreted within different cultural contexts" (Crowther & De Costa 2017, p.453). Baker (2012) notes that teachers often rely on overgeneralizations. Vasquez and Sharpless (2009) emphasise the need to give explicit instruction to student-teachers about social functions, patterns, maxims and strategies. Student-teachers should "be aware of the destructive, culturalist discourses [they] might be conforming to or perpetuating" (Holliday et al, 2017, p.59). They require guidance in choosing sensitive language to express beliefs about cross-

A thematic linguistic analysis of IC

cultural comparisons or inter-cultural encounters, and in using linguistic markers such as modalities and reformulations (Dervin, 2010) that soften otherwise destructive language.

Teacher educators need to know the precise nature of their student-teachers IC orientation. The approach of analysis of IC orientation used in this article is transferable to any TESOL teacher education context, and should enable teacher educators to tailor a course to suit their students. The study used journals.

Exploring Student-Teachers' Beliefs and Stance through Their Journals

Journals have a variety of forms and purposes (Barkhuizen, Benson & Chik, 2014). Teacher belief journals predominantly describe reflections about their teaching practice (Andrei, Ellerbe & Kidd, 2018; Farrell, 2007). This study analyzed another genre: "response" journals, which include reactions to recommended reading and discussions presented in input sessions, and reflections on cultural, theoretical or philosophical issues (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010).

Journal writing of university students has been shown to heighten their intercultural awareness. Jackson's (2011, p. 84). journal study of Hong Kong English majors who sojourned in England suggests that, because they were encouraged to reflect on issues related to identity, diversity and equality, they became "more aware of what it means to be a responsible, intercultural citizen in today's interconnected world". Dressler and Tweedie's (2016) journal study of Japanese study-abroad students found that conversing with their teachers about their learning outside class helped to bridge cultural differences. These studies had a thematic focus rather than a linguistic one.

Journals are likely to contain more affective stance than other academic writing because they are, by nature, a personal inner dialogue, however publicly available. A number of studies have shown that journals reflect a negative stance. Bailey (1990, p.218) noticed

that a teaching journal was a place for language teachers to "experiment, criticize, doubt, express frustration, and raise questions" about their practice. Luzón (2011, pp.525-532) met "personal expressions of negative emotions or feelings, which project conflict into online discourse" in blogs, and, in particular, adjectives used to criticize or ridicule other's ideas and values. These studies had a linguistic focus rather than a thematic one.

The current study combines the thematic with the linguistic features, the former revealing which of the IC values were assimilated, and the latter discovering the epistemic and attitudinal stance markers involved. The next section of this article describes how themes and markers were categorized, and how markers were analyzed within the themes.

METHOD

Of the 13 English teachers in the course, ten chose to write a journal. There were three citizens of Mainland China, three of Taiwan, one of Saudi Arabia and three of the UK. They were mostly female and aged 25 to 35. They gave informed consent for their writing to be used in research, knowing that the journals would be anonymized and they could withdraw at any time. At the end of the course, the entries from their journals were passed into an *Excel* file. There were 5,605 words across a corpus of 102 journal entries, an entry being defined as a complete topic in a separate paragraph. Columns beside each entry were labelled with the student number, the line entry number, the nationality, and the pragmatics tradition (see Table 1). The entries from all students were stored in one corpus, as the study did not aim to investigate students from particular cultures but rather to analyse the thinking of a group of student-teachers, to discover their common and salient characteristics. The data was then coded thematically and linguistically, to prepare for the analysis.

Thematic coding entailed classifying each entry according to themes that emerged; the categories were thus not conceived *a priori*. The two main themes were "IC Orientation",

or commitment to IC values, and "Non-IC Orientation", or lack of commitment to IC values. The sub-themes within the themes were devised by the researcher, having examined the data. There were no instances of prejudice, which is why there is no sub-theme for it. Table 1 indicates the sub-themes within the two themes.

PLACE TABLE 1 HERE

In the IC Orientation theme, the first four categories were based on Byram's *savoir être* and *savoir s'engager* components. The fifth was for entries showing an awareness of culture as complex, multi-layered and multi-faceted. Entries were labelled

- "decentering", if the writer seemed to appreciate how their own culture's meanings and behaviours might look from an outsider's perspective;
- "critically evaluating own culture", if they appeared to be suspending belief in their own culture's meanings and behaviours and questioning their own values and practices on the basis of explicit criteria;
- "accepting", if the student wrote suspending disbelief and judgement with respect to particular meanings, beliefs and behaviours of the other culture;
- "critically evaluating other culture", if they explained the values and behaviour of the other culture, making the ideological basis of their judgements explicit, saying what effect they had and how they might be misunderstood, rather than using negative stereotyping;
- "attitude to culture", if the student showed a non-essentialist ideology, refusing to see culture as a self-versus-other matter, or rejecting the country of origin as the sole explanation of behaviour and mentioning the influence of other variables on people's behaviour.

A thematic linguistic analysis of IC

Entries were categorized Non-IC Orientation if they contained the following features, which lack evidence of "accepting" the characteristics of the cultural group described, and constitute otherization:

- "positive stereotyping", if the student overgeneralized perceived positive qualities of the other culture;

- "polarization", if the writer polarized overgeneralized descriptions of two cultures;

- "implied negative stereotyping", if they overgeneralized evaluations of the other culture and implied intolerance or a criticism, and did not make the ideological basis of their judgements explicit;

- "overt negative stereotyping", if they overgeneralized evaluations of the other culture that spelled out an explicit criticism with a lexicalised negative attitude and an exaggeration of the qualities and behaviour that the student did not accept, not making the ideological basis of their judgements explicit.

Each entry in the corpus was labelled in adjacent columns for as many of the sub-themes as were detected (see Table 2 for the sample Excel sheet).

PLACE TABLE 2 HERE

The linguistic coding involved tagging words in each entry's text column according to the attitudinal stance (see Table 2). Realisations of attitudinal stance were taken to be expressions of personal feeling about entities or propositions, emotional responses, moral evaluations, value judgments and assessments (Thompson & Hunston, 2000). Words were classed as positive, if they referred to inherently positive entities or states, or expressed a positive evaluation or emotion with regard to an entity or state, e.g. "satisfied", "happily" and "likeable". They were classed as negative, if they referred to inherently negative entities, or

expressed a negative evaluation or emotion with regard to an entity or state, e.g. "disgusting", "embarrasses" and "unfortunately".

The linguistic coding also involved tagging the text according to the epistemic stance. Markers of epistemic stance were understood as evidential expressions which indicate the status of knowledge and degrees of certainty. Words were classed as downgrading if they were hedging expressions, limiting commitment to a proposition, e.g. "perhaps", "I was wondering" and "kind of", and agent avoiders such as passives and impersonals with "they". These were taken to be "weak" stance. Words were classed as upgrading if they were boosting expressions, indicating a high degree of certainty and conviction, e.g. "definitely", "terribly" and "very" (House & Kasper, 1981). These were taken to be "strong" stance. Berman (2004) suggests that since the choice of hedging or boosting expressions depends on the addressors' position vis-à-vis the issue at hand, it can be seen as overlapping with attitudinal stance. However, the study considered attitudinal stance distinct from epistemic because epistemic stance is not always attitudinal.

Stancetaking can also show degrees of presence or orientation (Gray & Biber, 2012; Hyland, 2005), indicating the degree to which the writer places themself in the text, positioning them in relation to the proposition and to the audience. Although this was not central to the study, given the interest in decentering, personal pronouns and possessive adjectives were examined.

The coded data was then analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. The main focus of analysis was qualitative, the researcher reflecting on the causes and effects of themes and words. Quantitative thematic analysis was carried out using *Excel*'s Advanced Filter function, to calculate the number of filtered lines in each category. Quantitative linguistic analysis used *WordSmith 6* to find the frequency of personal pronouns, possessive adjectives and stance markers.

Thematic coding and analysis can be subjective, suffering from inconsistency and a lack of coherence (Holloway & Todres, 2003). However, the qualitative-quantitative method of data analysis, flexible interpretation and triangulation adds trustworthiness to the study. The researcher maintained objectivity in her coding, by ensuring that the categories were clearly defined. Interpretation of findings was necessarily subjective: interviewing the participants was not a viable option, since they had finished their degree and returned home by the time the analysis was undertaken. However, this limitation was compensated for by triangulation which used two informal and unstructured feedback techniques. The first involved gathering spontaneous comments offered by attendees at presentations of the study in an International Pragmatics Association (IPrA) Conference and a British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL) seminar. The second entailed logging unguided written opinions from 14 personal tutees on a subsequent MSc TESOL degree, who volunteered to read a first draft of this paper and give opinions on general interpretation scenarios.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides a brief overview of the students' approach to the task, and an outline of the distribution of stance markers. Overall, the students seemed to direct their comments to the lecturer herself and possibly to "westerners" in general, as if explaining and defending their culture. Most of the students chose to take a culturalist approach, possibly influenced by the class question "write anything that occurs to you on how the principles and maxims apply or do not apply *to another culture that you know*". This might have been avoided if it had been phrased as "to other social groups, contexts or values that you have experienced worldwide", although in all probability they might still have turned to their own country's predominant culture as a resource. Most journal entries contain comments of a

general nature rather than descriptions of personal experiences, in part, one could reasonably assume, because the class question invited generalizations, but also because opinions tend to be based on generalisations. Importantly, despite the fact that they were not invited to evaluate cultural values of any social group, they frequently expressed positive and negative attitudes to cultures.

Table 3 shows the stance expressions that had at least two tokens, indicating the number of tokens in brackets.

PLACE TABLE 3 HERE

There are 57 tokens expressing positive attitudinal stance, constituting 1% of the total word count. These refer to entities carrying inherent positive qualities rather than describing the emotions and feelings of the students. 97% of the positive attitudinal stance markers are used in conjunction with explanations of the students' own culture, rather than the other culture. They explained it in terms of showing "politeness", "respect", "harmony", "friendliness", "hospitality" and "solidarity". It seems that students wanted to give a good impression of their own culture. Entries showing a positive attitude to own culture could be interpreted as implying that the other culture was inferior. Example 1 contains a typical explanation of own culture, with its positive adjective "polite" (countries in brackets after examples indicate the nationality of the students).

Example 1

I do feel that Chinese can be more indirect when they hope to be <u>polite</u> to the listener (Mainland China)

A thematic linguistic analysis of IC

As far as tokens of types expressing negative attitudinal stance are concerned, there are 98, amounting to 1.8% of the total word count, almost double the number of those expressing positive stance. The ratio of negative stance markers about own culture to negative stance about the other culture is 50:50.

The corpus contained 107 tokens of words expressing weak epistemic stance, constituting 2% of the total. The proportion of these in IC-orientation entries and non-IC was similar. There were 94 tokens of words expressing strong stance, 1.9% of the total, making them almost as frequent as those expressing weak epistemic stance, with little difference between IC-orientation entries and non-IC. Analysis of epistemic stance markers indicated different degrees of the student's commitment to IC values, as the following discussion of findings demonstrates.

IC Orientation: Decentering, Accepting Other and Critically Evaluating

Nearly all the entries (92 out of the 102) show an orientation to IC values. Figure 1 shows the number of entries in each sub-theme. Some entries were labelled with more than one sub-theme.

PLACE FIGURE 1 HERE

About two-thirds of the entries with an orientation to IC values (64 of the 92 entries with an IC orientation) show evidence of decentering. Example 1 contains a generalization about own culture in the third person ("Chinese" and "they"). The third person referring expressions such as "Chinese people", "they" and "their", rather than the inclusive "we" meaning "I + they" (Wodak, De Cillia, Reisigl, Liebhart, Hirsch, Mitten & Unger, 2009),

suggest that they were looking at their culture from the point of view of people from other cultures. *WordSmith 6*'s wordlist revealed that "they" and "their" (0.80% and 0.30% respectively) occur more frequently than "we" and "our" (0.68% and 0.14% respectively), and concordances show that 21 of the 45 instances of "they", and 12 of the 17 instances of "their", are used to describe their own culture. It could be that decentering when talking about one's own culture is a deictic distancing politeness strategy, especially important when talking about it in a positive light. On the other hand, it could be that the non-UK students felt far from home, and might have used "we" and "our" had they written the journals in their own country.

Although the students tended to represent their own culture in a positive light, 17 entries show an ability to question the values of their own culture. Example 2 illustrates this, again with a generalization.

Example 2

Greetings are veeeery <u>boring</u>. You have to ask about all the family members. (Saudi Arabia)

The student seemed to question their own culture's politeness conventions with negative attitudinal stance, the adjective "boring" intensified with "very", itself intensified with the informal extended vowel. The hyperbole in "<u>all</u> the family members" intensifies the self-criticism.

In 17 entries, students appeared to accept the values of the other culture, as in Example 3:

Example 3

Putting forth your opinions very assertively is <u>frowned upon</u> in Japan. The key is to appear to agree with everyone - this is <u>very important</u> to keep harmony within a group. In order to avoid disrupting the harmony it is <u>essential</u> to be vague so as to feel your way around a conversation. (UK)

Here, the UK student expresses an empathetic understanding of Japan that putting forth opinions assertively "is frowned upon" and that it is "very important" and "essential" to keep harmony. It is a culturalist generalization, however: they do not mention that it might not apply to all Japanese people, or that keeping harmony is a value important to many cultures.

The smallest sub-theme in the IC-oriented category is that of critically evaluating the other culture showing principled cultural awareness (only 7 entries). See Example 4.

Example 4

Japanese indirectness - not imposing your opinion on someone else makes evaluating explaining something much more subtle process than in English - i.e. speaker presents facts, descriptions, gives lots of examples and leaves listener to draw own conclusions, pick up inferences. Rude to tell listener what he should think/get out of something. Can make Japanese sound <u>vague and non-committal</u> when speaking English. (UK)

In this polarized generalization, the student shows an acceptance of the "subtle" politeness principles behind Japanese indirectness norms, and then evaluates the effect the norms have on others. Their observation that Japanese people might be misunderstood as "vague and non-

committal when speaking English" contains negative adjectives and yet they appear not to be criticizing Japanese people but rather explaining why they may sound that way.

10% of the entries (10 out of the 92) showed a rejection of the culturalist view. These students appeared not to see "culture" as an absolute explanation of behaviour, mostly noting social variables such as age, educational background, gender and social context that affect behaviour. Example 5 contains generalization that shows an understanding of factors influencing indirectness, irrespective of culture.

Example 5

<u>Personality</u> or <u>individual factors</u> can also influence use of indirect speech acts (seems obvious sorry). (Mainland China)

IC Orientation and Stance

Some entries with an IC orientation contain indicators of weak epistemic stance. Example 6 is an illustration.

Example 6

When doing studies on misunderstandings between native speaker and a second language user, we should not only focus on problems caused by culture. The newly learnt second language <u>can</u> be one reason as well. For example, Chinese people <u>are said to</u> have longer pauses than many other foreign people. <u>Actually</u> we don't find it a big problem. <u>Sometimes</u> it <u>can</u> <u>just</u> be that we are processing our ideas into another language. <u>Maybe</u> we should also look into people's behaviour in their first language before we come to a conclusion. (Mainland China)

The student rejects the notion of "culture" as a sole explanation of behaviour, ascribing Chinese people's behaviour instead to the time that it takes to process ideas in an L2. The argument comes heavily hedged with eight indicators of weak stance: "can", "are said to", "actually", "sometimes", "can", "just" and "maybe". This could either be a negative politeness strategy to ease the imposition on the reader, or a genuine marker of a low level of commitment to the truth to reduce the extent of the generalization.

Some entries showing IC orientation contain strong epistemic stance markers. Example 7 is a typical forceful statement of opinion:

Example 7

It's no longer the issue with "culture shock" nowadays. If it occurs breakdowns in communication with NS in China, the main reason is because of the lack of language competence. It is true we need translate L2 into L1. But it's definitely not due to culture difference. (Mainland China)

This entry also rejects "culture" as an explanation of behaviour, pointing again to language competence as a variable, "It is true" and "it's definitely not" adding force to the assertion.

One could draw the conclusion that the students had an IC-orientation: most appeared to engage in decentering, question the values of their own culture, accept the values of the other, and some rejected the notion of culture as an absolute. However, the analysis of non-IC orientation showed that half of the entries coded as having IC orientation often coexist with polarization and overt negative stereotyping.

Non-IC Orientation: Polarization and Overt Negative Stereotyping

Nearly half of all entries (46 out of 102) show aspects of non-IC orientation; this is half the number that show aspects of IC orientation (92 out of 102). Figure 2 demonstrates the distribution of each aspect. Again, some entries contain more than one non-IC orientation sub-theme. Many entries were labelled IC and non-IC because they contain both elements.

PLACE FIGURE 2 HERE

Two-thirds of the entries with non-IC orientation (29 of the 46) contain polarization. This is nearly a third of all entries, which means that a substantial proportion of the entries containing general statements are in fact polarizations. Example 8 is representative.

Example 8

Over centuries, Chinese have nurtured their own philosophy, tradition, customs, beliefs, and so on, which are <u>all very different from those of western countries</u> (Mainland China)

The Chinese people are juxtaposed with "western countries", their values described as categorically different. In some entries, students polarize the differences whilst at the same time accepting the values of the other culture. In Example 9, the student shows empathy with westerners' reaction to certain Chinese questions, calling it "natural", using "westerners'" terms to evaluate the questions as "private" and "an invasion of privacy" (mentioned twice) and speaking with westerners' voice in "it's none of your business".

Example 9

"Where are you goin?", "going to work?", "what are you doing?", "are you busy?"

"have you eaten?" - these polite <u>Chinese</u> greetings may be viewed by <u>westerners</u> as an

invasion of privacy. The natural reaction of <u>westerners</u> to these greetings would most

likely be "it's none of your business!", since in <u>western culture</u> such questions are

private questions and asking them could be interpreted as an invasion of privacy, to

which westerners are very sensitive. These phrases are very normal and common to

<u>the Chinese</u> because <u>Chinese culture</u> emphasis concern for others. It shows manners

and politeness. (Mainland China)

However, the sharp contrast with Chinese "polite", "normal and common" greetings, which

emphasise "concern for others", "manners and politeness", positions Chinese culture and

western culture as diametrically opposed. This entry illustrates how polarization has two or

more overgeneralizations. It seems based on the presupposition that all Chinese people ask

these questions and that no "westerners" ever ask such questions.

Whereas there are very few positive stereotypes of the other culture (3 out of 46) or

implicit negative stereotypes (3 out of 46), overt negative stereotypes of the other culture

occur quite often (11 out of 46), i.e. 11% of the total corpus of 102 entries. This article

focuses on these, since they contain the destructive discourse that is of concern. Example 10

illustrates the evaluative nature of overt negative stereotyping

Example 10

I've even heard a story about a Chinese student living in America. One day when he

entered the office which he was sharing with his professor, the professor was on the

phone. The Chinese student still walked into the office and got ready to work. The

19

professor turned to him and said, "I'm having a private phone call, would you please walk outside for a few minutes". This conversation <u>shocked</u> the Chinese student, to whom the professor was <u>rude</u> by directly requesting his leave. He thought he has <u>"lost face"</u>. (Mainland China)

This anecdote about an unsuccessful intercultural encounter is told in negative terms: the conversation "shocked" the Chinese student (negative verb) because the professor was "rude" to him (negative adjective) with his direct request that made him "lose face" (negative verb). The entry does not speculate on the possible sensitive nature of the phone call or consider that the US may have different politeness and face-saving traditions. Example 11 contains a criticism.

Example 11

In China, there is <u>no need to</u> keep saying thank you the whole time. Most often you are already considered a friend and friends <u>don't need to</u> keep saying thank you to each other. This is one of many things that are misinterpreted by westerners. Chinese do not always say thank you. If you are a friend then it is just accepted that you mean well. To keep saying thank you is a bit <u>dodgy</u> and <u>suspicious</u>. But who knows, this is always enough room made for cultural errors. (Mainland China)

This is more than an East-West polarization: that would be "westerners say thank you more frequently than Chinese people". This is a criticism of the perceived "western" convention of "saying thank you the whole time" to friends, overtly lexicalised with negative attitudinal stance adjectives "dodgy" and "suspicious", gaining strength by their juxtaposition. The student explicitly appears to deny any rationale for the "western" norm with "there is no

need" and "don't need to. The expression "to keep saying" itself indicates censure of the practice, as in "Why do you <u>keep saying</u> she's got a master's degree?" (COCA).

Non-IC Orientation with Stance

Entries with overt negative stereotypes are characterised by intensifiers, hyperboles and repetition. The intensifier "very" is used frequently. In Example 8, "all <u>very</u> different", widens the gap between China and the "western countries", and in Example 9, "westerners" are "<u>very</u> sensitive", possibly meaning "<u>too</u> sensitive", which could be taken to be a criticism, emphasizing the polarization: "These phrases are <u>very</u> normal and common to the Chinese". Example 12 illustrates the meaning that the intensifier "very" can have.

Example 12

In China, people will make <u>very</u> personal comments i.e. tell you that you have a spot when you are <u>well</u> aware of the fact. (UK)

The "<u>very</u> personal", again implies "too personal for my liking", and the "<u>well</u> aware of the fact" seems to mean "so aware I don't want it pointed out to me". This strongly expressed sentiment is a negative stereotype, but not an example of prejudice: the student is critical of perceived overgeneralized behaviour but is not saying that they do not like Chinese people.

Hyperboles have the potential to strengthen negative stereotypes more than intensifiers do. In Example 11, "saying thank you <u>the whole time</u>" is clearly an exaggeration. Example 13 illustrates three negative hyperboles.

Example 13

When you're truly awful at something, people will remark that you do it well. It made me <u>cringe</u> especially when I was told "your Japanese is very good" after I had made an obvious mistake. I noticed Japanese complementing each other when someone was bad at something. I think it's to make the person feel better even when it's <u>obvious to everyone</u> that what they've done is <u>a pig's ear</u>. Not sure that it really works. Maybe it's to lighten the atmosphere or something. (UK)

The accumulated exaggerations "made me cringe" (a negative stance verb, stronger than "made me uncomfortable"), "it's obvious to everyone" (gaining strength through the repetition of "obvious", with an all-inclusive indefinite pronoun) and the hyperbolic metaphor "a pig's ear" (meaning "a disastrous mess") constitute a strong dismissal of Japanese traditions. The UK student may have felt superior by comparison or may just have expressed frustration: either way, it is an extremely negative evaluation. Again, this is a strongly boosted negative stereotype about a Japanese speech act, not a statement of prejudice devaluing all Japanese people.

The repetition of overt negative stereotypes with intensifiers and hyperboles is particularly striking. The double repetition of Example 11 ("no need to" and "don't need to") and Example 13 ("obvious mistake" and "obvious to everyone") increase the strength of the negative evaluation. The triple repetition of Example 11 ("keep saying thank you", "always say thank you" and "keep saying thank you") has a hammer effect. Triple repetition is illustrated in Example 14.

Example 14

In Chinese-western intercultural encounters, Chinese appear to interrupt more and in a more marked way. In these contexts, <u>westerners would inaccurately conclude that Chinese are rude</u> since many western people regard interruptions impolite. Rather than associate rudeness with Chinese's linguistic behaviour, however, <u>westerners associate rudeness with Chinese themselves</u>. Their reasoning may be as follows: <u>Chinese interrupt, interruptions are rude, therefore Chinese are rude</u>. Such reasoning is unfortunate for Chinese, who come from a culture where interruptions may be associated with friendliness, indicating the conversationalists active involvement in the interaction. (Mainland China)

Example 14's three statements of the same case give the entry an accusatory tone. The student shows "westerners" in a bad light, appears to accuse "westerners" of racism and makes "westerners" look blinkered in their simplistic logic. The triple repetition reinforces the polarization of negative attitude to other and positive attitude to self. The double and triple repetition were structures that emerged during analysis; they serve to emphasise the strong epistemic stance and negative attitudes in negative stereotypes.

The students often mixed overt negative stereotypes of the other culture with hedges. However, the mitigation is largely ineffective in the face of the negative co-text. It is possible that the modal auxiliaries are intended to soften criticism: witness Example 9's "<u>may be</u> viewed", Example 14's "<u>may be</u> associated". However, they lose their force amidst the contradictory explanations in the co-text. It is also possible that "may" is simply a linguistic habit of people who have learnt English in China.

Adverbial hedges are also used, mostly likely to soften the overt negative stereotype. In Example 11, the student could be attempting to soften the triple repetition about the

western way of thanking, with the impersonal infinitive "to keep saying" masking the agent, and the understater "a bit" is possibly intended to soften the "dodgy and suspicious", although "a bit" can be used as an intensifier. The entry finishes on an apparently tolerant note with "this is always enough room made for cultural errors", but the downtowner "but who knows" undercuts this tolerant note, distancing the student from the truth value of it. In effect, the weak epistemic stance does little to reduce the strength of the message. Similarly, in Example 13, it may be that the student wishes to mitigate the strength of their criticism of the Japanese habit of "complementing each other", with the epistemic hedge "<u>I think</u> it's to make the person feel better", but the exaggerated critical account undermines it. The "<u>Not sure</u> that it really works" could be intended to soften the criticism or it could be intended to strengthen it. The downtowner adverb and hedging disjunctive general extender in "<u>Maybe</u> it's to lighten the atmosphere <u>or something</u>" suggest that the student does not believe their own explanation. Throughout this entry, it is ambiguous whether the student is expressing genuine uncertainty or whether the weak stance is actually intended to highlight the points made. Example 14 has another instance of ineffective downtoning: the gentle chiding with the negative adjective in "<u>unfortunate</u> for Chinese" does little to soften the expression of offence taken at the "westerners'" logic about Chinese interruptions.

Summary and interpretations

This study has shown that almost all the entries exhibit an orientation to IC values. Although prone to describing their own culture with positive attitudinal stance, in general, students showed an ability to decenter, and seemed willing to question the values of their own culture and accept the values of the other culture. Some appeared to have a non-essentialist view of culture, and others softened their assertions about culture with weak epistemic stance markers. On the other hand, nearly half of all entries also suggest a non-IC orientation: a third

contain polarized cultural differences and in 11% of the corpus there is evidence of overt negative stereotyping when describing the other culture, strengthened with intensifiers, hyperboles and triple repetitions, often unconvincingly softened by modal auxiliaries and hedging adverbs.

There is no way of knowing how genuine the orientation to IC values was or how negative the students actually felt about the other culture. There appear to be three possible scenarios of interpretation:

1. The students had an IC orientation but their entries did not reflect this successfully because of their negative words and structures. They may have been unaware of how their use of language leads to an impression of negativity.

2. They were not completely convinced by IC values but attempted to position themselves as IC-oriented, in order to respond appropriately to the course, since the person reading their journals was to be the person marking the assignments. If they had not been required to submit them, they might have written differently. Their attempts to hide their ambivalence were thwarted because they were unable to express their dissonance with sensitive language.

3. They had a non-IC orientation and their entries reflected this. They *were* able to express their dissonance using sensitive language but chose not to, because they deemed polarization and negative stereotyping to be acceptable.

Triangulation based on MSc TESOL personal tutee opinions suggested that Scenarios 1 or 2 best explained the findings. One Chinese personal tutee pointed to Scenario 1:

the reason why some entries showed negative attitude towards other cultures is merely that they choose the wrong words and they are not able to express the ideas in an appropriate way.

The international student-teachers in the study were users of English as a Lingua Franca with an overall IELTS score of 6.5: it could be that some of their language choices were a reflection of the linguistic resources available to them. Some of the entries pointed to language limitations: the Example 6 entry noted, "the newly learnt second language" can be a cause of misunderstandings, and in Example 7, the student blames breakdowns on "the lack of language competence". Similarly, at the IPrA conference presentation, it was suggested that the linguistic level may contradict the meaning that the participants intend. In addition, at the BAAL seminar, Chinese student attendees explained that they were unaware that "very" and "keep saying" sound negative, stating that the latter is a formula taught in Chinese schools without any suggestion that it might have negative connotations. Another Chinese personal tutee preferred Scenario 2, relating it to conflict between the IC values discussed in the TESOL course and the views on cultural differences that they brought with them:

On the one hand, we believe that leaving out the stereotypes and holding a critical view on cultural differences is the "right" thing to do as our teachers mention it a lot and this is one of the important criteria for our assignment … On the other hand, I think sometimes our thoughts are still strongly influenced by some polarized and overgeneralized views on cultural differences that we got earlier in our life.

Thus informal triangulation suggests that students for whom English was not their first language had an IC orientation but appeared not to because of their insufficient command of

English, and that they were ambivalent about IC values because of clash with polarized views that they brought with them. However, it is unlikely that insufficient command of English and ambivalence about IC values account for the overt negative stereotyping of the other culture with intensifiers, hyperboles and triple repetitions, and although this triangulation adds trustworthiness to the interpretation of findings, it does not add generalizability. The UK students certainly could not have attributed their boosted overt negative stereotyping to insufficient command of English; for them it could have been a non-IC orientation or a lack of awareness of their own discourse.

CONCLUSION

This article has demonstrated how this thematic linguistic framework of analysis can reveal the extent of their student-teachers' orientation to IC values. Any teacher educator in a Masters degree in TESOL worldwide could undertake such an analysis, and this could serve as in-course needs analysis and post-course evaluation, indicating what curriculum is needed.

The implications for teacher education learning tasks are many. Teacher educators may facilitate discussions of the limitations of stereotypes, the effect that social variables other than country of origin can have on language usage, and the cultural values that transcend frontiers. They could show the results of their analysis of the student-teachers' writing to the student-teachers themselves, to increase their awareness of their own language usage. Student-teachers whose first language is not English could learn about lexico-grammatical choices that may risk implying a negative attitude. All students could be helped to search in publicly available corpora for any potentially offensive words that they had used, and determine whether there are negative connotations. Educators could encourage their

A thematic linguistic analysis of IC

student-teachers to find alternative ways of expressing themselves, such as modalities and reformulations (Dervin, 2010, p.170).

        As far as further research is concerned, this thematic-linguistic framework of analysis could be replicated with a larger database across universities in order to gain a general understanding of student-teacher IC orientation. Researchers could investigate students from particular cultural groups to discover whether IC orientation and English stance markers vary according to the culture that students identify with. Researchers could compare English stance markers used in expressions of IC orientation with stance markers in other languages used by people describing other cultural identities.

References

Abrams, D. (2010). *Processes of Prejudice: Theory, Evidence and Intervention*. (Equality and Human Rights Commission Research report 56). London: Equality and Human Rights Commission 2010. https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/research-report-56-processes-prejudice-theory-evidence-and-intervention

Andrei, E., Ellerbe, M., & Kidd, B. (2018). "What am I going to do?" A veteran teacher's journey of teaching writing to newcomer English language learners. *TESOL Journal*. *10*(2), 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.413

Bailey, K. (1990). The use of diary studies in teacher education programmes. In J. C. Richards, & D. Nunan (Eds.), *Second Language Teacher Education*. (pp. 215-226). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Baker, W. (2012). From cultural awareness to intercultural awareness: culture in ELT. *ELT Journal, 66* (1), 62-70. http://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccr017

Barkhuizen, H., Benson, P., & Chik, A. (2014). *Narrative Inquiry in Language Teaching and Learning Research*. Oxford: Routledge.

Berman, R. A. (2004). Introduction: developing discourse stance in different text types and languages. *Journal of Pragmatics, 37*(2), 105–124. http://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(04)00189-4

Bottom, P., Dejun, K., & Zhang, Z., (2007). *The Palimpsestic Syndrome in Management Research: Stereotypes and the Obliteration Process.* Retrieved October 11, 2019, from

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/255662057_The_Palimpsestic_Syndrome_in_Management_Research_Stereotypes_and_the_Obliteration_Process

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Byram, M., B. Gribkova, & Starkey, H. (2002). *Developing the Intercultural Dimension in Language Teaching a Practical Introduction for Teachers.* Strasbourg: Council of Europe. https://rm.coe.int/09000016802fc1c3

COCA (The Corpus of Contemporary American English) https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/

Crowther, D., & De Costa, P. (2017). Developing mutual intelligibility and conviviality in the 21st century classroom: insights from English as a Lingua Franca and intercultural communication. *TESOL Quarterly*, *51*(2), 450-460. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.341

Dervin, F. (2010). Assessing intercultural competence in Language Learning and Teaching: a critical review of current efforts. In F. Dervin, & E. Suomela-Salmi, (Eds.), *New Approaches to Assessment in Higher Education* (pp. 157-173). Bern: Peter Lang.

Dovidio, J.E., Brigham, J.C., Johnson, B.T., & Gaertner, S.L. (1996). Stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination: another look. In N. Macrae, M. Hewstone, & C. Stangor (Eds.),

Foundations of Stereotypes and Stereotyping (pp. 276-319). New York: Guildford Press.

Dressler, R., & Tweedie, M. G. (2016). Dialogue journals in short-term study abroad: "today I wrote my mind". *TESOL Journal*, *7*(4), 939-967.   https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.254

Fantini, A.E. (2018). *Intercultural Communicative Competence in Educational Exchange*. Oxford: Routledge.

Farrell, S. (2007). *Reflective Language Teaching: from Research to Practice.* London: Continuum.

Gray, B., & Biber, D. (2012). Current conceptions of stance. In K. Hyland, & C. Sancho Guinda, (Eds.), *Stance and Voice in Written Academic Genres* (pp. 15-33). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gut, A., Wilczewski, M., & Gorbaniuk, O. (2017). Cultural differences, stereotypes and communication needs in intercultural communication in a global multicultural environment: the employees' perspective. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, *43*(1). https://www.immi.se/intercultural/nr43/gorbaniuk.html

Holloway I., & Todres L. (2003). The status of method: flexibility, consistency and coherence. *Qualitative Research*, *3*, 345–357. http://doi.org/10.1177/1468794103033004

Holliday, A., Hyde, M. A., & Kullman, J. (2010). *Intercultural Communication: An Advanced Resource Book for Students*. Oxford: Routledge.

Holliday, A. (2013) *Understanding Intercultural Communication: Negotiating the Grammar of Culture*. Oxford: Routledge.

Holliday, A., Kullman, J., & Hyde, M. (2017). *Intercultural Communication: An Advanced Resource Book for Students.* Oxford: Routledge.

Houghton, S.A (2013). Introduction. In S.A. Houghton, Y. Furumura, M. Lebedko, & S. Li, S., (Eds.), 2013. *Critical Cultural Awareness: Managing Stereotypes through Intercultural (Language) Education* (pp. 1-2). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

House, J., Kasper, G. (1981). Politeness markers in English and German. In F. Coulmas, (Ed.), *Conversational Routine* (pp. 157-186). The Hague: Mouton Publishers.

Hyland, K. (2005). Stance and engagement: a model of interaction in academic discourse. *Discourse Studies, 7*(2), 173-91. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445605050365

Ishihara, N., & Cohen, A. (2010). *Teaching and Learning Pragmatics.* Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd.

Jackson, J. (2011). Cultivating cosmopolitan, intercultural citizenship through critical reflection and international, experiential learning. *Language and Intercultural Communication, 11*(2), 80-96. http://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2011.556737

Luzón, M. (2011). "Interesting post, but I disagree": social presence and antisocial behaviour in academic weblogs. *Applied Linguistics, 32*(5), 517–540. http://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amr021

Scollon, R., Scollon, S., & Jones, R. (2012). *Intercultural Communication: A Discourse Approach*, 3rd Edn., Malden, MA, and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Smirnova, A. (2013). Strategies of discursive manipulation in the headlines of articles about Russia in the quality British Press. In I. Kecskes, & J.Romero-Trillo, (Eds.), *Research Trends in Intercultural Pragmatics* (pp. 479-492). Boston: de Gruyter Mouton.

Spencer-Oatey, & H., Franklin, P. (2009). *Intercultural Interaction: a Multi-disciplinary Approach to Intercultural Communication.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Thompson, G., & Hunston, S. (2000). Evaluation: an introduction. In S. Hunston, & G. Thompson, (Eds.), 2000. *Evaluation in Text: Authorial Stance and the Construction of Discourse* (pp. 1-26). New York: Oxford University Press..

Vásquez, C., & Sharpless, D. (2009). The role of pragmatics in the Masters TESOL curriculum: findings from a nationwide survey. *TESOL Quarterly, 43*(1), 5-28. http://doi.org/10.1002/j.1545-7249.2009.tb00225.x

Vief-Schmidt, G. (2013). Managing stereotypes through complex cultural dialogue and transformative processes. In S. A. Houghton, Y. Furumura, M. Lebedko, & S. Li, (Eds.), 2013. *Critical Cultural Awareness: Managing Stereotypes through Intercultural (Language) Education* pp. 135-157. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Wodak, R., De Cillia, R., Reisigl, M., Liebhart, K., Hirsch, A., Mitten, R., & Unger, J.W. (2009). *The Discursive Construction of National Identity.* 2nd. ed., Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

WORD COUNT: 8,493

Table 1:   **Sample Excel Sheet**

Attitude to own - Decentering	Attitude to own - Critically evaluating	Attitude to other - Accepting others	Attitude to other - Critical cultural awareness	Attitude to 'culture' - Accepting variables	Rejection of 'culture' - Other social variables	Attitude to other - Positive stereotypes	Attitude to other - Polarisation	Attitude to other - Implied negative stereotypes	Attitude to other - Overt negative stereotypes	No.	Line	Nationality	Area	TEXT
1	1									7	9	SAU	CA	Opening and closing sequence loooong(AN) and boring(AN)
1										7	10	SAU	CP	meaning 'stupid'
1										7	11	SAU	CP	In Arabic we violate the maxims with wives and children but we do this just(ED) to be nice(AP) - 'Your hair cut is very nice' and it
1	1									7	12	SAU	PP	Modesty's very(EU) nice(AP) but without 'I am so bad at singing' just to make the listeners say 'no you are so good'
1							1			8	1	UK	PP	In China you are usually asked in order 'where are you from?''where do you work?''how much do you earn?' (taboo in UK)
									1	8	2	UK	PP	China 'we'll do it next week' flouting maxim of quality face saving, no intention(EU) of carrying out the act
1										8	3	UK	PP	Scots are usually self-effacing ie you would never ask 'how well did I sing'. This would(ED) be fishing for compliments(AN) and could(ED) incur a sarcastic(AN)/ironic retort
									1	8	4	UK	PP	China - strangers tell you how beautiful(AP) you are and on the same occasion(EU) how fat(AN) you are!(EU)
									1	8	5	UK	PP	In China, people will make very(EU) personal(AN) comments ie tell you that you have a spot when you are well aware(EU) of the fact.

Table 2:   **Thematic level categories**

Theme	Sub-theme	Example
IC Orientation		
Attitude to own culture	Decentering	"To foreigners, we seem like this."
	Critically evaluating	"I think we're too..."
Attitude to other culture	Accepting others	"Their way of doing it seems good"
	Critically evaluating	"Going by these principles, they're.."
Attitude to "culture"	Accepting variables	"It depends on other variables"
Non-IC Orientation		
Attitude to other culture	Positive stereotypes	"They always do this so well"
	Polarization	"We're the opposite of them."
	Implied negative stereotypes	"*We*'re not rude and barbaric"
	Overt negative stereotypes	"They're rude and barbaric"

Table 3:   **Types of stance expressions with at least two tokens**

Stance	Type	Examples
Attitudinal	Positive (57)	"polite" (8), "politeness" (7), "respectful" (5), "harmony" (3), "friendliness" (2), "hospitality" (2), "OK" (2), "solidarity" (2) and "virtue" (2)
	Negative (98)	"rude" (10), "bad" (2), "boring" (2), "discrimination" (2), "impolite" (2), "misunderstand" (2), "misunderstanding" (2) and "rudeness"
Epistemic	Weak (107)	"may" (15), "seems to" (8), "just" (8), "can" (7), "could" (7), "I (don't) think" (7), "might" (7), "sometimes" (7), "not really" (6), "maybe" (3), "actually" (2), "almost" (2), "are said to" (2), "I feel" (2), "I was told" (2), "personally" (2) and "would" (2)
	Strong (94)	"very" (18), "always" (14), "even" (11), "often" (11), "especially" (8), "quite" (6), "it's obvious" (5), "many" (5), "a lot / lots" (3), "of course" (2), "obvious" (2), "really" (2) and "too" (2)