Translocal Pragmatics: Operationalizing Postnational Heuristics to Locate Salient Cultural Overlap

Massimo Verzella
North Dakota State University

Andrew Mara
North Dakota State University

Translocal pragmatics: Operationalizing postnational heuristics to locate salient cultural overlap

Massimo Verzella
North Dakota State University, USA

Andrew Mara
North Dakota State University, USA

Introduction

The importance of creating projects that allow students enrolled in American universities to collaborate with students enrolled in foreign institutions cannot be overemphasized. However, for these projects to be effective in terms of learning outcomes, it is important that instructors identify the factors that either prevent or prompt fruitful collaboration across cultural boundaries. The power of cultural boundaries demands that research on intercultural communication conceptualize and measure cultural difference. Additionally, research on intercultural communication has been irrevocably altered by the pace of communication technology change that allows for rapid and rich cross-cultural communication across great distances. An understanding of culture that takes into consideration how the variety of communication technologies that Arjun Appadurai calls "technoscapes" (Appadurai, 1996) allow faster and denser interaction across all sorts of boundaries can help researchers ask questions that are relevant.

In global studies, there are two streams of research that look across a quantitative and qualitative divide. Geert Hofstede (1980, 1991) and Edward T. Hall (1976) pioneered research on intercultural communication by quantifying culture in terms of the nation-state. On the other side of the divide, Michael Billig (1997) and Ingrid Piller (2011) are two of the most influential thinkers who challenged these theories with intersubjective, qualitative, and sociolinguistic studies based on a non-essentialist view of culture. While it is useful to operationalize culture quantitatively, and it is also useful to analyze data at a granular level, both these methodologies miss the mark in providing flexible precision for researchers.

This does not mean that quantitative approaches traditionally used in intercultural communication research must be set aside for good. In particular, some constructs, or dimensions of culture, such as *Individualism* and *Collectivism*, and *Self-Construal* (Independent

Self-Construal and Interdependent Self-Construal) continue to have good explanatory power, especially when they are treated as multidimensional (i.e., independent constructs). The problem with Self-Construal is that establishing, for example, that a group of individuals leans toward Independent Self-Construal does not provide usable information for policy makers and professionals who are interested in establishing projects of international collaboration. From finding that a group of American students have a higher score in Independent Self-Construal than their counterparts in a foreign institution, can we assume that the American students will be generally less prone to cooperate on a project with their peers overseas? Can we assume that the American students will be less attentive or sensitive to the needs of their peers overseas?

This is what studies on Self-Construal suggest: the higher the score for Independent Self-Construal, the more frequent the problems in communication and interaction with individuals of different nationalities. Besides being rather simplistic, these conclusions seem improbable because the evidence collected is insufficient to predict student behaviors in collaborative projects. Group interactions are much more complex and emergent than questionnaires used to detect Self-Construal data can capture, and collaborations that span national boundaries seem exponentially more complex. While useful, the results obtained by measuring Self-Construal must be triangulated with data obtained through other methods if we want to obtain more usable findings.

Our study begins to address gaps in research in how Self-Construal relates to collaborative projects in the field of intercultural communication by combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to obtain more fine grained and usable findings. We are combining Geert Hofstede's and Edward T. Hall's nationalist quantification of culture with Michael Billig's and Ingrid Piller's intersubjective qualitative and sociolinguistic approaches by triangulating our survey with a discourse analysis of electronic student communication during a group project. While it is useful to operationalize culture quantitatively, and it is also useful to sample data at a granular level, these two methods need to be combined to give flexible precision to researchers.

In order to bridge the gap between the scale of the nation-state and the individual, we combine linguistic pragmatics with a theory of globalism that uses Appadurai's postnational heuristics to quickly locate and analyze translocal networks during the process of localization. Our study of a series of translocal technical translations demonstrates how networks in postnational contexts delimit the importance of proximity and nationality as identity markers. By refocusing analysis upon the pragmatic imperatives of social interaction in a pedagogical technical translation exercise, our study locates strategies for encouraging cultural practices during individual attempts to foster successful cooperation and collaboration.

In contemporary networks that operate in translocal flows of information, erosion of boundaries becomes the key trait for a good communicator who wants to meet their interlocutors in a *no-man's-land* (Planken, 2005) between native languages and cultures. Research on English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) has shown that non-native speakers of English tend to use several strategies to accommodate linguacultural diversity (Cogo, 2009; Klimpfinger, 2009). Miscommunication is more likely to occur between native and non-native speakers than it is when non-native speakers interact with each other. One explanation for this phenomenon is that native speakers

often fail to negotiate meaning, and instead treat their norms as universally applicable. In turn, non-native speakers often produce ineffective utterances because they focus too much on norms, rather than creatively producing their own variants, which entails the use of such pragmatic strategies as repetition, code-switching, and echoing (House 2003). Our study, which compares several iterations of a transnational pedagogical collaboration, the Trans-Atlantic and Pacific Project, demonstrates the agility of combining studies on the pragmatics of ELF with Appadurai's heuristics. By sketching out the process of operationalization as one of locating useful and destructive overlap, we show how heuristics can increase the salience of cultural difference while maintaining a focus on useful commonalities, and locate features that mitigate difficulty in a transnational and translocal communication context.

Purpose

The goal of this study is to develop new heuristics, an operationalizable and digestible framework, to investigate intercultural communication without relying too much on proximity and nationality as identity markers. A related goal is to foster successful cooperation and collaboration in international projects so that students can meet the learning objectives set by their respective universities. In order to achieve these goals, we combined a traditional quantitative approach to the study of intercultural communication with a qualitative approach informed by concepts and theories of cross-cultural pragmatics.

Too many studies overlook the importance of analyzing how participants use the primary tool for communication: language. The way in which we use language is connected to our pragmatic competence, of course, but also is also connected to the way in which individuals choose to perform their identity in a variety of communities of practice and networks. By refocusing analysis upon the pragmatic imperatives of cultural production in a technical translation exercise, our study intends to reveal how to locate cultural overlap in order to foster successful cooperation and collaboration.

The key research question for this study is whether the construct of Self-Construal helps in predicting patterns of interaction between students involved in cross-cultural collaborations. The hypothesis connected to this research question is that Independent Self-Construal is likely to pose obstacles for students trying to communicate and collaborate in international, cross-cultural projects. Additionally, we hope to answer the question about whether a mixed methods approach can help in obtaining a more fine-grained analysis of patterns of interactions between interlocutors during cross-cultural communication.

Before elaborating on questions of method, it is important to note where researchers have investigated the predictive power of Self-Construal. Much of this key research has been conducted within contexts involving intercultural communication (mainly quantitative) and cross-cultural pragmatics (mainly qualitative). From cross-cultural pragmatics we draw interpretative tools for a qualitative analysis of the conversations between research participants. After a description of the background on Self-Construal research, our article outlines the participants, corpus, and mixed-methods that we employed through a combination of quantitative surveys and discourse analysis of project communication between participants. Our results, which roughly adhere to expectations for culturally-specific Self-Construal, diverge from

expectations about directness when communication needs and media shift. We conclude our article by showing why high scores in Independent Self-Construal do not impair students' ability to resort to accommodation strategies and facework to build trust and rapport.

Literature review

Central theories in the field of intercultural communication establish a connection between the way in which individuals construe their sense of self• whether as relatively more independent or more interdependent• and the way in which they interact. Self-Construal is an explanatory variable developed by Markus and Kitayama (1991) who were looking for an individual-level equivalent to the aggregated cultural variability of individualism vs. collectivism. In their view, members of collectivistic societies tend to have higher interdependent and lower independent self-construal, whereas the opposite relationship is expected in individualistic societies. Brewer & Gardner (1996) and Kashima et al. (1995) introduced a third dimension of Self-Construal: Relational Self-Construal (RelSC), based on close relationships. In light of the goals of our present research, we found it unnecessary to measure Relational Self-Construal.

Theory and research on the constructs of Independent Self-Construal (IndSC) and Interdependent Self-Construal (InterSC) vacillate between treating them as unidimensional (i.e., opposite ends on the same continuum) or multidimensional (i.e., independent constructs). Kim et al. (1996) criticize Markus and Kitayama for being dichotomous and argue that the two dimensions should be considered together in order to obtain more precise results (also Harb & Smith, 2008; Hardin, Leong, & Bhagwat, 2004). In keeping with theoretical predictions that the two Self-Construals are orthogonal dimensions rather than opposite ends of a single continuum, Singelis developed the Self-Construal Scale (SCS, Singelis, 1994) to measure IndSC and InterSC. Another instrument to measure Self-Construal has been developed by Gudykunst et al. (1996), Kuhn & McPartland (1954), and Kim et al. (2009) who adapted Leung and Kim's scale (1997).

It is important here to underline that the construct of Self-Construal, along with other constructs such as *Power Distance* or *Uncertainty Avoidance*, have been "fabricated" to measure culture quantitatively and are based on the idea that every nation is characterized by its own well-defined culture. Michael Billig (1997), Brendan McSweeney (2002) and Ingrid Piller (2011) have led a group of scholars who questioned the basic assumptions underlying Hofstede's work, i.e. the idea of the nation-state as the locus of culture, the reduction of culture to five dimensions, and the idea that value orientations can be quantified. According to McSweeney (2002), the main shortcoming of Hofstede's model is the fact that it describes culture in terms of national culture. The problem is that more often than not nations are home to a diverse number of social groups and communities of practice whose distinctive cultural traits stand in the way of complete integration into a homogenized national culture. Piller (2011) points out that Hofstede's understanding of culture is theoretically and practically inadequate in that it is based on essentialist views of the nation as the foundation of culture.

Notwithstanding the granularity shortcomings of the quantitative model, a degree of generalization is necessary if one hopes to operationalize our understanding of culture. In other words, if we are to make sense of the data that can be gained by research into cultural differences, we need a theoretical framework that allows us to compare and draw typological

generalizations concerning similarities and dissimilarities between social groups. At the same time, to obtain a more fine grained understanding of cross-cultural interactions, quantitative approaches and methods can be combined with qualitative methods. This is where cross-cultural pragmatics provides a critical research tool.

Cross-cultural pragmatics enhances our understanding of communication styles across cultures highlighting both the universality of certain language functions (such as requesting, refusing, apologizing, etc.) and the cultural specificity of forms used to accomplish these functions. Research on cross-cultural speech acts started in the 1980s when Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper undertook a project to study cross-cultural speech acts in different languages such as English, Canadian French, Danish, German, Hebrew, and Spanish. The Cross-cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP) project aimed to determine the degree to which native speakers of the languages studied used direct or indirect strategies of requesting and apologizing. The results were published in the ground-breaking book entitled *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and Apologies* (1989). Brown and Levinson (1987) identified a universal logic of politeness strategy, and H. P. Grice, who formulated theories of conversation (1975), contributed to interest in the field pragmatics.

As it were, the search for "universals of politeness" and "universal maxims of conversation" dominated the field until Anna Wierzbicka's key study—*Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: The Semantics of Human Interaction* (1991) —joined voices with her "comrades-in-arms" (as she calls a group of scholars headed by Michael Clyne and Cliff Goddard) in defense of culture as a key factor determining ways of speaking and communicating. Comparisons of speech acts used by individuals of different backgrounds (Wolfson 1989; Nelson, Al-Batal, and Echols 1996) have revealed that the same speech act may be realized differently across cultures, following norms of usage which are specific to a given speech community. In their focus on functional features of language use, ethnographers (Gumperz, 1982; Gumperz and Hymes, 1972; Hymes, 1974) and sociolinguists (Bernstein, 1971; Labov, 1975) have explored how different cultural or social groups develop different linguistic strategies to accomplish a variety of communicative goals. It is in following these research attempts to find more generalizable, and therefore more operarationalizable, communication traits that we hope to contribute to the conversation. By finding ways to apply global insights into local contexts, and then returning these local insights to the global scope of research, our hope is to both use and improve research that aggregates cultural patterns of interaction.

Methods

Participants
The research participants were 42 undergraduate students enrolled in upper-division writing classes at a US Midwestern research university and 44 graduate students enrolled in the course Translation from English into Italian at an Italian university. These two institutions are located in the geographic outskirts of Italy and the US: When compared to the student population of other universities, they have a relatively homogeneous groups of students. Only 11% of the participants at the Midwestern US university and 5% of the participants at the Italian university were international students. The international students were all non-native speakers of English.

Most of the participants belonged to the age group 18-24 (76% in Italy and 86% in the US); the percentages for the age group 25-34 are 24% (Italy) and 11% (US). Only one American student belonged to the age group 35-44. American students were mostly male (88%), Italian students mostly female (89%).

All the students participated in the Trans-Atlantic and Pacific Project (TAPP), a complex educational network of bilateral writing and translation projects. Bilateral translation projects and multilateral projects are those that connect classes in writing, usability testing, and/or translation at several universities across the world (see Mousten et al. 2010; Mousten et al. 2012; Maylath et al. 2013). TAPP's main aim is to share insights into collaborative writing across borders and cultures, and, in the course of this work, to gain knowledge of cultural conventions and practices.

We collected a corpus of 34 written conversations for a total of 20,162 words. The longest exchange was 3,629 words, the shortest 278 words. Five pairs of students reported using Facebook during the project but the vast majority (over 95%) of the corpus consisted of email. While relatively small, our corpus is representative of the type of exchanges that happen in TAPP projects. Representativeness is determined by the fact that the students enrolled in the two sections of Writing in the Technical Profession taught by Verzella in the US and those in the Translation class in Italy collaborated to complete projects that are typical of TAPP. The limitations of this corpus stem from the limitations of the TAPP network of students, and are inherent to the project, rather than this particular study. Because our focus was on pragmatic competence in a very specific rhetorical situation rather than language use in discourse, considerations on the size of the corpus were shadowed by a stronger concern for homogeneity of the corpus and integrity: the samples of language we collected consist of entire documents, not fragments, that captured complete speech events.

Design

For this research we used a sequential mixed methods design that starts with a quantitative method (Self-Construal survey) followed by a discourse analysis involving the detailed exploration of the conversations (Email, Facebook) between the research participants.[1] Using Kim, Wilson, Anastasiou, Aleman, Oetzel & Lee's (2009) scale for Self-Construal, we constructed and distributed pre-surveys to both American and Italian students participating in the Trans-Atlantic and Pacific Project (TAPP) to measure their attitudes on independence and interdependence. In addition, the students were asked if they would volunteer their email and other electronic correspondence related to TAPP. For the students who consented, we collected, anonymized, and qualitatively coded this data to see how students constructed interactions, and to see if their Self-Construal differed or corresponded to their interactions.

Research on Self-Construal relies on self-report measures with Likert-type scales. We used Kim, Wilson, Anastasiou, Aleman, Oetzel & Lee's scale (see Appendix) because this is the most reliable and most recent scale for measuring Self-Construal. The reliability for independent construal is .85 and the reliability for interdependent construal is .80. In this scale, independence and interdependence items are mixed so that participants are less likely to realize what the scale intends to measure and thus provide more spontaneous responses. Students completed the Self-

Construal survey online (Polldaddy.com) by following a link that was sent to them via email. We also collected the following demographic data: age, sex, country of origin, and mother tongue, to be able to evaluate the impact of these variables on Self-Construal.

According to Self-Construal literature, individuals with high scores in IndSC

- Are less receptive to others and have fewer social concerns;
- Resort to self-enhancing forms of self-presentation;
- Defend their own *face* and approve of other positive self-representations;
- Tend to differentiate themselves from others;
- Are less likely to imitate behaviors (including linguistic behaviors) or to conform to be accepted;
- Prefer direct communication;
- Have socially disengaging emotions (they are unlikely to experience guilt, for example).

The second stage of our research, the qualitative study of the conversations between the participants, aimed at assessing the validity of these findings. We wanted to know if there is a direct correlation between IndSC and the preference for direct communication. We also wanted to know if it is true that IndSC poses obstacles to fruitful communication and collaboration.

Using a discourse analysis comparison of the digital conversations between the participants allowed us to understand how networks in postnational contexts delimit or enable the importance of proximity and nationality as identity markers. Another reason why it is important to qualitatively analyze the way in which participants use language has to do with pragmatic competence. Miscommunication and, more generally, communication problems and even lack of communication, are often due to pragmatic failure: non-native speakers of English may participate in perfectly grammatical interchanges and still fail on a pragmatic level, i.e. their speech act does not produce the desired outcome.

For instance, whenever Italians, especially from the south, go and visit a friend or relative, they are likely to refuse offers of food even when they would like to accept. Guests refuse until the host repeats the offer two or three times in an emotional crescendo of emphasis. In this specific situation, 'no' can mean 'yes' in Italy, but this is more uncommon in the US. Another example: when two native speakers (NSs) of English enter a conversation, they often find it challenging to formulate a request with an appropriate tone or to express disagreement without offending the interlocutor. The situation becomes even more complex in interactions between NSs and non-native speakers (NNSs) or between two or more NNSs using a lingua franca. To foster cooperation between individuals who belong to different cultures we need to find out what different interlocutors who use the selected lingua franca—English in the case of this research—*do* with this code and why. This kind of study that examines multiple speakers across a range of contexts requires the use of qualitative research methods.

Our approach to discourse analysis is indebted to recent studies that suggested ways to investigate discourse structure using corpus analysis (Biber et al. 2007; Upton and Cohen, 2009) even if existing theoretical frameworks are rather difficult to apply to the study of texts that do

Page 18

Rhetoric, Professional Communication, and Globalization
May 2015, Volume 7, Number 1, 12-28.

not neatly fit into categories of genre. Email conversations, for instance, constitute hybrid forms of writing that incorporate moves and tactics that are typical of speech.

To analyze the corpus of the student correspondence, we used an inductive, bottom up procedure to create categories for our discourse analysis. Besides allowing us to generate a theory rather than using one off the shelf, grounded theory guarantees a certain degree of richness of explanation as a researcher observes what patterns emerge in the corpus. While we did not interpret the results in the light of a specific theory, cross-cultural pragmatics and Appadurai's post-national heuristics provided the language and the tools to code the results and organize data into meaningful structures.

We started our work on the corpus by identifying functional categories that appeared to characterize the conversations collected. We agreed that politeness and facework strategies occupied a central role in the corpus. Hence our decision to code use of direct/indirect language; use of apologies; instances of hedging/tentativeness; and use of repetition (explanation and rephrasing). After segmenting, classifying, and analyzing the discourse units in each conversation of the corpus by applying this analytical framework, we were able to identify general patterns of discourse organization across all the conversations in the corpus.

Results and discussion

The Self-Construal survey contained few surprises. The numbers for Self-Construal were well within the ranges that we expected to see for both American and Italian students. Additionally, as we expected, the discourse analysis provided granularity for understanding the differences between groups. What we did not expect, however, was the way that discourse analysis helped us understand how four different facets of communication unfolded across translocal contexts.

First, the student groups' use of language seemed to have a role in how Self-Construal may play out in one-on-one online interaction. Second, the choice of medium for student communication made a large difference in how Self-Construal both manifested and changed over the course of a project. Third, the grounded theory helped identify how Self-Construal plays out dynamically, and over time. Finally, and most importantly, we found some divergent patterns of interaction from what we might expect if Self-Construal was the sole, or even primary, determiner of how individuals create new connections across cultural boundaries. Despite the fact that the Self-Construal scores further validate intersubjective theories about Italians and Americans, the interactions that occurred between students demonstrated that the dynamic and emergent demands of translocal interactions often drive the way in which individuals express their identity linguistically.

Independent self-construal

Both American and Italian students have high scores for Independent Self-Construal. In a 1-7 Likert scale the Median never dipped below 5 and the Mode never dropped below 6 for the American students. For the Italian students, both Median and Mode never went below 5. We ran a T-test in order to find whether there were statistically significant differences between the Means obtained for each item. There were significant differences only for the following items.

- I voice my opinions in group discussions.

- I act as a unique person, separate from others.

For these two items the null hypothesis (H_0: $\mu_{USA} = \mu_{ITA}$ at ± 0.05) was rejected (P-value $< \pm$; T-value $>$ T-critical), i.e. the score for American students was significantly higher than the score of the Italian students.

	Mean US	Mean ITA
I voice my opinions in group discussions.	6.26	5.80
I act as a unique person, separate from others.	5.82	4.77

Interdependent self-construal

Participants also scored high for Interdependent Self-Construal. In the 1-7 Likert scale the Median and Mode never go below 4 for the American students. For the Italian students, the median went below 4 only for one item while the Mode dropped below 4 for three items. Once again we ran a T-test in order to find whether there were significant differences between the means obtained for each item from the two groups of students. There were significant differences for the following items:

- I would sacrifice my self-interests for the benefit of my group.

- I try to meet the demands of my group, even if it means controlling my own desires.

- I act as fellow group members prefer I act.

For these three items the null hypothesis (H_0: $\mu_{USA} = \mu_{ITA}$ at ± 0.05) was rejected (P-value $< \pm$; T-value $>$ T-critical): the score of the American students was significantly higher than the score of the Italian students.

	Mean US	Mean ITA
I would sacrifice my self-interests for the benefit of my group.	5.58	4.71
I try to meet the demands of my group, even if it means controlling my own desires	5.94	4.82
I act as fellow group members prefer I act.	4.88	2.97

These results support the hypothesis that the two dimensions are orthogonal, i.e. individuals construe their identity as both Independent and Interdependent. Compared to the Italian students, American students appeared to lean more towards Independent Self-Construal but they also had higher scores in Interdependent Self-Construal: they have a stronger sense of belonging to a community. In other words, the fact that American students place a high value on independence and personal achievement does not mean that they are blind to their social

Rhetoric, Professional Communication, and Globalization
May 2015, Volume 7, Number 1, 12-28.

Page 20

responsibilities or to the importance of serving their community. Typical values of Scandinavian culture, the call for a cohesive and egalitarian society, the emphasis on principles of solidarity, modesty and emotional sobriety, appear to play an important role in the way individuals living in the upper Midwest shape their identity. In contrast, Italian students are less prone to tailor their behaviors to the needs of the group. This explains the very low Mean for the item "I act as fellow group members prefer I act."

A remarkable difference between Southern Italian and American Midwestern culture is that Italian children and young adults are often encouraged to stick out from the crowd and assert their personality and point-of-view with strong determination. Interestingly, there is no direct equivalent for the word 'opinionated' in Italian. Having strong opinions is not semantically associated with being arrogant. In addition, the importance of solidarity and group cohesion is less emphasized in Italy than it is in the American Midwest. These cultural differences must be taken into consideration when it comes to interpreting research on Self-Construal and intercultural communication in the context of this experiment.

Direct language

One of the most salient aspects of Self-Construal is the use of direct language to establish boundaries for communication. Groups of students who rate high on IndSC should predictively depend upon a high degree of direct language rather than trying to locate individualized discursive signals from their interlocutor. People with high IndSC project their identity, rather than using strands of new discourse to weave their identity with their interlocutors. Keeping communication general and direct is an easy way to maintain an emotional distance and to maintain a distinct identity.

For the great majority of the student interlocutors, this communication strategy was performed during the duration of the collaboration project. Students would ask for help directly, and proffer help just as directly, using declarative and interrogative sentences that picked up few of the idiosyncratic communication strategies of their interlocutors. While there were moments where the students could have asked contextual questions about difficulties, most of the conversational extension had to do with strategies for overcoming difficulties (rather than, say, asking about what was wrong, or why there were issues beyond how to fix them). Two of the student collaborators, "Ophelia" and "Hamlet" demonstrated directness, and sometimes overt formality, with email closings like "Regards," "Sincerely," "Thank you, bye" and "Thanks." Ophelia's opening to the conversation seemed characteristically direct:

> Hello Hamlet,
>
> I'm Ophelia (first name and family name), the Italian student.
>
> I'm contacting you for the Trans-Atlantic & Pacific-Project. I'm waiting for you sending me the text.
>
> Write to me back soon.
> Regards,

Ophelia

The stilted syntax demonstrates a degree of awkwardness, and can explain some of the directness; however, when it is coupled with the fact that we saw this pattern even with the most fluent of the Italian and American interlocutors, it indicates that language facility is only one element influencing the choice of direct communication.

Medium difference

In order to facilitate rapid communication, participants in the translation partnership were encouraged to use whatever medium best facilitated the task goal. We discovered, upon examining the students' communication that the medium made quite a bit of difference in how the students represented themselves. In one of the most ephemeral forms of communication—Facebook messaging—students displayed writing habits least indicative of an independent Self-Construal. This matters because two of Appadurai's *scapes*—mediascapes and technoscapes—predict that media are central to understanding how global communication unfolds. I f media choice makes such a large difference—rather than just national origin—Appadurai's supposition about global networks may be crucial for nuancing how we plan for communication. In our sample, the most personal and interdependent exchanges occurred via Facebook messages. The conversation between Hermione and Leontes is representative of these kinds of interactions. Peppered with emoticons, personal reassurances that problems were not the other person's fault, the medium opened the students up to express concern for their partner's well-being, and were filled with turn-taking, cues for reassurance, and feedback. Despite the fact that their earliest interactions were characteristically direct, the later interactions that occurred on social media were playful, and took on more of the quality of a conversational dialog that indicates a more intimate friendship.

L: It isn't your fault. But did that fix the problems?

H: No that's ok now. I'm printing the file and starting translation ;)

L: Do you have everything you need, or is there something else that you need me to send to you or help you with now? I have a 5 hour drive to get back to school. So, I will be offline during that time. I just want to make sure that you have everything you need before I leave.

H: Don't worry, I'm ok :)

While this coordination might seem unsurprising, or even commonplace between two college students, it is actually rare in the corpus of data that we collected, and is also infrequent in our experiences coordinating these kinds of international projects. Quick back-and-forth communications don't happen nearly as often between students in different countries as they do with students in the same country, state, city, and institution. Just by using communication technologies that favor quick, informal methods of communication, students with a high IndSC begin to show more concern, and share more contextual detail.

In addition to the students who used Facebook messages as a communication medium, there were students who showed lower IndSC communication styles who indicated that they would like to continue the conversation in another medium like Facebook. Florizel and Perdita, for example, had shared a great deal of information between each other via email—using emoticons, communicating important personal details beyond what is necessary for the project, indicating emotional states, and asking about the other person's well-being. After three rounds of emails, Facebook accounts were requested and offered. Soon thereafter, the communication via email stopped (and the Facebook communication was not offered to the researchers). The small sample makes it impossible to know the cause of the correlation between more intimate/lower IndSC communication styles and medium—students who fall lower on the IndSC scale may simply prefer to use a medium that facilitates communicating a lot of individual context—still, the connection between medium and communication style seems very strong and worth further exploration.

Divergence from self-construal expectations

The divergences that cannot be attributed to medium provided the most fruitful area for mixed-method analysis. For example, directness was somewhat mitigated by the use of several politeness strategies aimed at saving face. The Italian students heavily relied on apologies even when they were not necessary. Jessica: "Sorry but I have another question." Emilia: "Sorry for annoying you." Some went as far as promising they would mend their ways: "I swear, next time I will be less detailed" (Desdemona). In their responses, American students reassured their project partners in their own non-emphatic way: to Hermione's "sorry for my problems" Leontes replied "It's not your fault. But did that fix the problems?" Whenever Italians apologized they seemed to expect to receive a stronger reassurance sprinkled with superlatives, but Leontes, in this case, could not possibly know about this cultural attitude and replied in a rather blunt way. American students were also prone to apologizing and providing explanations whenever they were not able to reply to their partner's emails in due time. They often reinforced both apologies and expressions of esteem and gratitude by repeating them at the beginning and at the end of their emails, and by using the sentence frame "Again, I…." Even though we did not expect a reciprocal change of style for either group, we did see numerous instances of students pragmatically adapting their communication strategies to afford a degree of face-saving without largely modifying their directness. The apologies and reassurances remained rather phatic, even as students must have been more aware of the cultural differences in using apologies and reassurances.

Students often withheld full commitment to assertions by assuming a tone of tentativeness through the use of lexical verbs such as "seem" and "try" (for example: "I am trying to include everyone, both engineers and experts;" Ophelia); the use of modals, conditional clauses, litotic constructions, the sentence frame "I hope…", "I am not sure I…", "I suppose I," and other hedging devices. In addition, social concern was conveyed through expressions of apology such as "sorry, but I need your help." Despite the fact that the majority of the communication was direct and unapologetic, the gaps in cultural understanding and linguistic and contextual differences necessitated acknowledgement of ambiguity and confusion. Instead of asking for a

lot of detail, people chose to acknowledge a lack of detail through hedges and preemptive apologies.

Additionally, high scores in Independent Self-Construal did not translate into low receptiveness to others, or the use of self-enhancing forms of presentation (which might be more typical in interactions between high IndSC people who know each other well). In contrast, some students used self-deprecating comments. Cleopatra, for example, wrote: "I'm a woman and I'm not very practical with cars." Goneril wrote: "Hopefully that description makes sense." With the goal of reassuring Hermione, who shared her struggles with learning English, Leontes wrote: "I have been speaking English my whole life and I can still use more practice." In a similar vein, Iago wrote: "While reading your email I received a sense that you are better at English than me." Although many of the students who used these hedges and self-deprecation were women, there were Italian and American men who employed these strategies as well. A larger sample size would be necessary to tease out how much of this pattern tracks across gender, how much of it might be local, and how much might inhere in the pragmatics of the situation.

Finally, concern was shown by the constant use of repetition, explanation, and rephrasing. For example Desdemona asked: "Who is the target audience? I mean is this translation going to be a website, a guidebook, or something else?" In this case Desdemona, a student of translation, realized that her partner might have problems deciphering the meaning of the technical term "target audience." In several emails, American students avoided the unclear antecedent problem by repeating the logical subject of the sentences instead of using pronouns. Leontes: "I hope you do not have any more problems with the files. If you have any more problems with the files, just let me know and I will try to help fix them." Notice here how the native speaker uses linear syntax and repetition to facilitate the decoding process. Notice also the use of hedging ("I will try to help"). Anthony accommodated his partner's level of competence in American English by defining himself as a "third-year student" instead of a "junior." Another American student, Goneril, added "3rd year" in parentheses to explain what she meant by "junior." Demetrius wrote: "I'm a second year Computer Science student." Volumnia: "This is my second year at university." In passing, it was interesting to observe how American students presented themselves by foregrounding their field of study and their progress to graduation, that is, their academic identity, whereas Italian students rarely provided information on their academic progress and interests and in four cases foregrounded their national affiliation, which the American students never did. Finally, one American student (Florizel) was so concerned about his partner that he provided the transcription of the pronunciation of his name (we cannot reproduce it here).

Conclusion

The accommodation strategies that we noticed emerged over the course of the interactions. American and Italian students initially conformed to what an analyst might expect to see with a high IndSC and InterSC. When the complications of the translation project emerged, however, students either enacted a medium change and shed some of the conventions, or employed linguistic and pragmatic workarounds in the form of hedging, preemptive apologies, repletion, extra explanation, or deference. In short, dependence was acknowledged tacitly when necessary; students neither planned for it, nor fully acknowledged it explicitly. Instead, students maintained

Rhetoric, Professional Communication, and Globalization
May 2015, Volume 7, Number 1, 12-28.

Page 24

both their independence and interdependence while prompting their partner to offer necessary context to get them through the task. The quantitative testing verified what we knew about where the students would start their interactions. The qualitative testing gave us a better picture of how students would navigate the complications that emerge from international translocal projects.

References

Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large cultural dimensions of globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Bernstein, B. (1971). *Class, codes and control, Vol.1: Theoretical studies towards a sociology of language*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Biber, D., Connor, U. & Upton, T. (2007). *Discourse on the move: Using corpus analysis to describe discourse structure*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins

Billig, M. (1997). *Banal nationalism*. London: Sage.

Blum-Kulka, S., House, J. & Kasper, G. (1989). *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and apologies*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Brewer, M. B., & Gardner, W. (1996). Who is this "we"? Levels of collective identity and self-representations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *71*, 83-93.

Brown, P. & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language use*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cogo, A. (2009). Accommodating difference in ELF conversations: a study of Pragmatic strategies. In A. Mauranen, & E. Ranta (Eds.), *English as a Lingua Franca: Studies and findings* (254–270). Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle,

Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole, & J. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics* (41-58). New York: Academic Press,

Gudykunst, W. B., Matsumoto Y., Ting-Toomey S., Nishida T., Kim K. S & Heyman, S. (1996). The influence of cultural individualism-collectivism, self-construal and individuals values on communication styles across cultures. *Human Communication Research*, *22,* 525-549.

Gumperz, J. J. (1982). *Discourse strategies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gumperz, J. J., & Hymes, D. H. (1972). *Directions in sociolinguistics: the ethnography of communication*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Hall, E. T. (1976). *Beyond culture*. Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, Doubleday.

Harb, C., & Smith, P. B. (2008). Self-Construals across cultures: Beyond independence-interdependence. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *39*(2), 178-197.

Hardin, E. E., Leong, F. L., & Bhagwat, A. A. (2004). Factor structure of the Self-Construal scale revisited. Implications for the multidimensionality of the Self-Construal. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *35,* 327-345.

Hofstede, G. (1991). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*. London, England: McGraw-Hill.

Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

House, J. (2003). English as a lingua franca: a threat to multilingualism? *Journal of Sociolinguistics 7*(4), 556-578.

Hymes, D. (1974). *Foundations in sociolinguistics: An ethnographic approach*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Kashima, Y., Yamaguchi, S., Kim, U., Choi, S., Gelfand, M. J., & Yuki, M. (1995). Culture, gender, and self: A perspective from individualism-collectivism research. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *69,* 925-937.

Kim, M., Hunter, J. E., Miyahara, A., & Horvath, A. (1996). Individual- vs. culture-level dimensions of individualism and collectivism: Effects on preferred conversational styles. *Communication Monographs*, *63*(1), 28-49.

Kim, M., Wilson, S. R., Anastasiou, L., Aleman, C., Oetzel, J., & Lee, H. (2009). The relationship between Self-Construals, perceived face threats, and facework during the pursuit of influence goals. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, *2*(4), 318-343.

Klimpfinger, T., (2009). "She's mixing the two languages together"—forms and functions of code-switching in English as a Lingua Franca. In A. Mauranen, & E. Ranta (Eds.), *English as a Lingua Franca: Studies and findings* (348–37). Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle.

Kuhn, M. H., & McPartland, T. (1954). An empirical investigation of self-attitudes. *American Sociological Review*, *19,* 58-76.

Labov, W. (1975). Academic ignorance and black intelligence. In M. Maehr & W. Stallings (Eds.), *Culture, child, and school: Sociocultural influences on learning* (63-81). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Leung, T., & Kim, M. S. (1997). *A revised Self-Construal scale*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii at Manoa.

Maylath, B., Vandepitte, S., Minacori, P., Isohella, S., Mousten, B., & Humbley, J. (2013). Managing complexity: A technical communication/translation case study in multilateral international collaboration. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, *22,* 67-84.

McSweeney, B. (2002). Hofstede's model of national cultural differences and their consequences: A triumph of faith • failure of analysis. *Human Relations, 55,* 89-118.

Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological Review*, *98*(2), 224-253.

Mousten, B., Humbley, J., Maylath, B., & Vandepitte S. (2012). Communicating pragmatics about content and culture in virtually mediated educational environments. In S. Kelsey & K. St. Amant (Eds.), *Computer-mediated communication across cultures: International interactions in online environments* (312-327). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

Mousten, B., Maylath, B., Vandepitte, S., & Humbley J. (2010). Learning localization through trans-Atlantic collaboration: Bridging the gap between professions. *IEEE-Transactions on Professional Communication*, *53*, 401-411.

Nelson, Gayle L., Al-Batal, M., & Echols, E. (1996). Arabic and English compliment responses: Potential for pragmatic failure. *Applied Linguistics*, *17,* 411-432.

Piller, I. (2011). *Intercultural communication: A Critical introduction*. Edinburgh University Press.

Planken, B. (2005). Managing rapport in lingua franca sales negotiations: A comparison of professional and aspiring negotiators. *English for Specific Purposes*, *24,* 381-400.

Singelis, T. M. (1994). The measurement of independent and interdependent Self-Construals. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *20,* 580-591.

Upton, T. A., & Cohen M. A. (2009). An approach to corpus-based discourse analysis: The move analysis as example. *Discourse Studies*, *11*(5), 585-605.

Wierzbicka, A. (1991). *Cross-cultural pragmatics: The semantics of human interaction*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Wolfson, N. (1989). *Perspectives: Sociolinguistics and TESOL*. New York, NY: Newbury House.

---

[1] This research has been approved by the IRB on 17 March 2014 (protocol #HS14206). All the participants have read the consent form that we prepared for this research. The completed surveys that the students filled online were anonymous. Emails was also anonymized and compiled into a corpus that will be kept on an encrypted key drive and kept in a locked cabinet.