Cultural Difference as a Resource for Arguments in Institutional Interactions
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Abstract

This article analyzes how institutional members orient to cultural difference during arguments in meeting interactions. Membership categorization analysis (MCA) of twenty-one hours of audio-recorded conversations from eight months of fieldwork with an Asian American Chamber of Commerce illustrates that participants orient to cultural difference as a resource when building, supporting, or opposing arguments about institutionally related activities. Participants constructed cultural differences between cultural categories or participants oriented to cultural difference as a taken-for-granted fact and used this fact to support their arguments. Overall, this study contributes to theorizing intercultural communication through illustrating how cultural difference is a discursive phenomenon. MCA of participants' interactions reveals nuanced, complex ways that cultural difference routinely constitutes institutional life.

Keywords: cultural identity, argument, institutional interactions, membership categorization analysis, intercultural communication, Asian American

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Studies analyzing intercultural communication in organizational contexts vary in their orientations to analyzing cultural difference. Some studies orient to culture as equivalent to nationality, compare communication norms from different cultures/countries, and highlight how organizational members communicate with members of another culture/country (Beamer, 1992; Mao & Hale, 2015; Leonardi & Rodriguez-Lluesma, 2013). These studies orient to cultural difference as a source of misunderstanding during workplace communication. Studies taking a critical approach focus on how intercultural communication in organizational contexts is shaped by histories of inequality among different cultural groups (Chen, 2014; Chen & Collier, 2012; Cruz, 2015; González et al., 2014; Lawless, 2015; Murphy, 2013; Murphy & Dixon, 2012; Na'puti, 2013). These studies orient to cultural difference as intertwined with racial, ethnic, and postcolonial inequalities. The above approaches foreground culture as shared aspects of a group. Studies conceptualize cultural difference either as a pre-existing, stable, entity that shapes participants' communication or as a shared identity participants mobilize around to resist inequalities.

This article extends understanding about intercultural communication in organizational contexts through highlighting the diverse ways organizational members orient to cultural difference as it applies to organizational life. The question this article addresses is, "how, and for what purposes, do culturally diverse organizational members orient to cultural difference during arguments in institutional interactions?" This paper conducts a discourse analysis of audio-and-video recorded meeting interactions among members of an Asian American Chamber of Commerce (AACC).

Cultural difference in everyday interaction

Discourse analytic approaches analyze interaction as a site where participants negotiate cultural differences (Bailey, 2015; Carbaugh, 2005). Discourse analytic findings do not list cultural norms for different communities, but rather explain how interactional choices made by participants orient to cultural norms or values (Bailey, 2000; Carbaugh et al., 2006; Gumperz, 1982; Katriel, 1990; Lie, 2017). These studies highlight that cultural difference emerges through participants' use of specific discourse practices in particular interactional and cultural contexts. Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA) is a discourse analytic approach that focuses on how participants construct their social worlds through the ways they deploy, characterize, and position identity categories in everyday interaction (Fitzgerald & Housley, 2015; Hester & Eglin, 1997; Sacks, 1974; Stokoe, 2012). Participants' category use indexes their "presumed common-sense knowledge of social structures", like culture (Hester & Eglin, 1997, p. 3).

Participants display common-sense knowledge about social structures through membership categories, category-tied predicates, category-bound activities, and membership categorization devices. Membership categories are "social types that may be used to describe persons" (p. 3) There are many available membership categories to describe a person (i.e., professional role, cultural identity), and participants' choice of category indicates the kinds of identities they see as most relevant to an interactional context. Participants display common-sense assumptions about membership categories through using category-tied predicates that describe the category and category-bound activities that construct categories as naturally engaging in certain kinds of activities (Stokoe, 2012). Participants orient to categories as belonging to a broader collection, or membership categorization device. Membership categorization devices emerge through interaction. The device of "culture" for example, includes different categories based on the categories the participants name in a particular moment of

interaction. In this study, participants orient to cultural difference as a social structure and through their interactions, and make knowledge about cultural difference relevant in interactionally specific ways.

Multiple studies use MCA when analyzing how participants index knowledge about cultural difference among their own culture and other cultures (Arano, 2019; Brandt & Jenks, 2011; Fukuda, 2006; Mori, 2003; Nishizaka, 1995; Zimmerman, 2007). Participants display knowledge about cultural difference through naming and differentiating among cultural identity categories and displaying assumptions about what is normal or expected for each category. Sometimes, participants orient to assumptions as "simple, taken for granted facts" (Brandt & Jenks, 2011, p. 54), through supporting, or at the least, not contesting an assumption. Other times, participants orient to assumptions about cultural difference as negotiable, and contest assumptions through narratives, questions, overt challenges, or expressions of doubt (Arano, 2019; Brandt & Jenks, 2011; Fukuda, 2006). Whereas this research analyzed constructions of cultural difference in interpersonal contexts, the current study analyzes institutional interactions. Studies using MCA to analyze institutional interactions illustrate that the kinds of membership categories participants name and the devices that categories constitute are tied to participants' institutional roles and goals (Shrikant, 2018; Dori-Hacohen, 2012; Hansen, 2005; Hansen & Milburn, 2015; Milburn, 2009). These studies do not analyze cultural difference in institutional contexts.

Argument and Institutional Interactions

Analyses of cultural difference illustrate that participants construct and negotiate assumptions about cultural difference as part of other conversational activities, such as getting acquainted (Mori, 2003) or accounting for assumptions (Arano, 2019). This study explores how

participants' orientation to cultural difference aligns with goals common during arguments. When participants build arguments, they orient "to a potential opposition" often through justifying their beliefs with "evidence or explanation" (Schiffrin, 1985, p. 40). When participants have arguments, they oppose one another's claims through strategies such as disagreeing with, questioning, or reformulating previous claims (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1990; Hutchby, 2013; Tracy, 2008; Vasilyeva, 2016). Studies analyzing intersections of culture and argument illustrate how arguments occur in culturally specific ways (Fitch, 2003; Lie, 2017). This study, however, analyzes how participants orient to cultural difference as a resource when building, supporting, or opposing their own or others' arguments.

Institutional contexts "enable and constrain the particular kinds of argumentative activity available to and undertaken" by institutional members (Hutchby, 2013, p. 6). The sequence of arguments, the topics they address, and/or the kinds of argumentative moves that are considered reasonable are institutionally specific (Aakhus, 2017; Hutchby, 2013; Reijven & Townsend, in press; Tracy, 2009, 2011; Vasilyeva, 2016; Xiong & Zenger, 2018). The way participants argue in institutional contexts constitutes institutional realities. When participants present opposing viewpoints during arguments, they display differing orientations to institutional realities (Hutchby, 2013). This study analyzes how participants' arguments construct realities about the ways cultural difference intersects with institutional contexts.

Methods

This study uses ethnographic and discourse analytic methods. Ethnography provides insight into institutionally-specific norms for interaction, roles of participants, and contexts surrounding cultural difference. Discourse analysis of turn-by-turn interactions provides insight into discursive strategies participants use when orienting to cultural difference during argument.

Ethnography

Data analyzed was gathered during eight months of participant observation of an Asian American Chamber of Commerce (AACC) located in a large, racially diverse Texas city (Shrikant, 2016). After receiving approval from the university review board and permission from the participants, the author spent three days per week at the AACC taking field notes and audio or video recording meetings, events, and informal interpersonal interactions. AACC members treated the author as an "intern studying the chamber" and as someone who shared an "Asian" identity. Participants in the AACC include the AACC staff, who plan all AACC programs and events, and AACC members, who serve on the AACC board, fundraise for the AACC, and attend AACC events. The AACC's goal is to support Asian American small business owners and Asian American professionals who work for corporations. AACC staff emphasize that they are not a cultural organization but rather an economic organization that supports business development among a particular subset of the business community (Asians).

AACC members overtly address cultural difference, in part, because "Asian" is not a natural identity category for the participants. Participants in the AACC are recent immigrants from 22 countries that, according to US norms for racial classification, count as "Asian". These include countries in East Asia (i.e., China, Japan , Korea), South Asia (i.e., India, Pakistan, Bangladesh), and Southeast Asia (i.e., Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam). Participants identify according to ethnic identities, but they united as "Asian" at the request of White, Texan politicians who wanted a single place to gather votes and endorsements from the "Asian" community (Shrikant, 2018). Thus, AACC members overtly discuss the cultural identities that make up their organization and, at times, discuss "Asian" as a singular cultural identity that differs from other US ethnic or racial identities.

Discourse Analysis

The focal data includes twenty-one hours of audio-recorded interactions from eleven meetings: seven AACC staff meetings, two AACC event-planning committee meetings, and two meetings between the AACC and other organizations. The other organizations include the YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association, focused on "eliminating racism" and "empowering women"; YWCA homepage, 2019) and Univisión (a Spanish language broadcasting company providing a variety of content for Latino/a/x communities; Univision homepage, 2019).

A word for word transcription resulted in 466 single spaced pages of transcripts. Arguments where participants oriented to cultural difference were transcribed using verbatim-enhanced transcription conventions (Craig & Tracy, 2021). See Appendix for transcription symbols. Verbatim transcription includes all words, partial words, and vocal sounds (i.e., uhs and ums). Transcription was enhanced through indicating when participants overlap speaking or emphasize, elongate, or use a raised pitch with certain words. This verbatim-enhanced transcription facilitates analyzing how participants' words and the ways they say them constitute discursive moves during arguments. Analysis of each excerpt traces how participants use categories, category-bound activities, category-tied predicates, and membership categorization devices throughout their arguments. The analysis also includes ethnographic information about relevant institutional roles, goals, and norms to support discourse analytic claims.

Findings

Analysis of eight excerpts highlights two themes in the data. First, participants constructed cultural differences between categories when building, supporting, or opposing

arguments. Second, participants oriented to cultural difference as a taken-for-granted fact and used cultural difference to support their arguments.

Constructing Cultural Difference during Arguments

In the following examples, participants construct cultural differences through positioning certain cultural categories as deviating from the AACC's or the United States' cultural and professional norms. Analysis of the below excerpt illustrates how Clara – an AACC representative – and Stephanie – a YWCA representative – make arguments about cultural differences for doing business between the United States and foreign countries. Through supporting one another's arguments about cultural difference, Stephanie and Clara position themselves and their organizations as capable of working with people from different cultural backgrounds.

```
Example 1
1    Clara        Um, we are working wi:th, a new new immigrants and refugee
2                 community as well. The refugee community is still maybe a
3                 couple, more years fro:m, um starting their own business?
4    Stephanie    Mhmm
5    Clara        but I can see them using this-your program
6    Stephanie    Mh↑m
7    Clara        beforehand because coming from a different country there are
8                 a little bit different, you know [ways of
9    Stephanie                                     [Ye::s
10   Clara        receiving credits and,
11   Stephanie    [Right
12   Clara        [credit always perceived as bad in a different country.
13   Stephanie    [Ri:ght
14   Clara        [Um    We just gotta-
15   Stephanie    Well and savings. I mean, we have someone in our office
16                who's from El Salvador and she's just like, you know, you
17                didn't trust banks.
18   Clara        Right
19   Candance     Yeah
20   Stephanie    So::
21   Clara        Mhmm
22   Stephanie    you know the idea of put your money and let someone els- no.
23                You didn- you know
24   Candance     [Yeah exactly
25   Stephanie    [So understanding those, cultural um
26   Candace      Mhmm
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27   Stephanie     differences there as well
28   Candace       Mhmm
29   Stephanie     when it comes to just finances in general yeah.
```

Clara names the categories "new immigrants" and "refugees" and characterizes

"refugees" with the category-tied predicate "maybe a couple more years from starting their own

business", thus positioning refugees as outside the institutional membership categorization

device. The AACC often connects with ("works with", 1) Asian refugees but only provides

services for people who are ready to start a business. Clara, therefore, needs to find services to

help refugees who are not ready to start a business. Clara orients to the sensitive nature of her

claim through mitigating it with probability markers ("maybe") (Schiffrin, 1987) and ending

with an upward intonation. Stephanie uses "mhm", which accepts Clara's claim and functions as

a continuer. Clara then uses the category-bound activity "using this-your program" to suggest

that the AACC's refugee contacts use YWCA's services, which help new immigrants adjust to

life in the U.S. Stephanie's "mhm" (6) with an upward intonation indexes an enthusiastic

agreement with Clara's suggestion.

In the next turns, Clara and Stephanie justify the claim that refugees are not ready to start

a business. Both attribute refugees' lack of business skills to cultural norms surrounding finance

in foreign countries. Clara positions refugees in the device of "foreigner" through using the

predicate "coming from a different country" (7), thus constructing distinction between

"foreigner" and "US" devices. Clara again mitigates her claim ("a little bit different", "you

know"), orienting to potential disagreement from Stephanie. After receiving preferred responses

from Stephanie (Ye::s, right, 9, 11), Clara reformulates her claim as an extreme case formulation

(Pomerantz, 1986). When describing the way that credit works in foreign countries, Clara uses

the word "always" to position her claim (credit is perceived as "bad" in foreign countries) as an

objective fact. In other interactions, Clara and AACC staff members discuss building credit as a

normal, expected part of starting a business in the US. Through this extreme case formulation, Clara ties the predicate "perceiving credit as bad" to the device "foreigner" and the categories it includes ("refugees").

Stephanie adds her own claim about cultural differences in regards to savings. Stephanie justifies her claim using double voiced discourse (Bakhtin, 1981) where she quotes someone and uses that quote to fulfill interactional goals. She names a category that belongs to the "foreigner" membership categorization device, "someone… from El Salvador", and quotes this person as saying: "you didn't trust banks" (16-17). Stephanie voices a foreigner who agrees with Clara and is able to do the sensitive activity of claiming expertise about a category of which she is not a part. This, in turn, meets Stephanie's interactional goals of supporting Clara's argument. Stephanie closes this argument through formulating the main point of their argument as "understanding those cultural um differences". Stephanie's formulation also constructs a team-like relationship (Stokoe, 2012) between professionals (she and Clara) and "foreigners" (refugees, new immigrants): professionals like Stephanie and Clara are responsible for understanding cultural differences and helping foreigners (new immigrants, refugees) settle into and start businesses in the US. Clara and Stephanie's argument builds a shared reality about cultural differences between United States' and refugee communities and the role of the YWCA and AACC in addressing these differences.

Analysis of the following example illustrates how participants construct cultural differences between Asian culture and United States norms for business when justifying out of the ordinary behavior of AACC members. Prior to the transcribed excerpt, Alf – the AACC president – states that he recruited a successful businesswoman, Veronica, to become an AACC board member. Veronica brought her children to a board meeting, which Alf evaluates as, "a

little bit, awkward. A professional setting and then you bring a kid". Alf constructs bringing children as not normal for "professional settings". Candace, an AACC staff member, and I reject Alf's characterization of Veronica as an "awkward" individual and instead position her as a normal mother through putting forward some explanations for her behavior: the babysitter canceled, Veronica might be a single mother.

The excerpt below starts when Alf rejects the relevance of the "mother" category and proposes an Asian cultural explanation for Veronica's behavior. Asian, unlike mother, is a category that applies to all members of the AACC. Clara supports Alf through providing an example of another AACC member – Sandra – who brought her children to a business event.

```
Example 2
1    Alf        No she's still- she's still thinking very community
2    Candace    Maybe
3    Natasha    Oh [maybe yeah
4    Alf           [In a community you bring kids. Like for example uh::
5    Clara      That thing-Sandra. Millionaire, lawyer. came to awards gala
6               with all of her [litters
7    Alf                        [Yeah and all of it on stage
```

Alf disagrees with Candace's and my explanations ("no"), and follows with an oppositional move where he provides a cultural explanation for Veronica's behavior: "she's still thinking very community". Alf uses a category-bound activity – "you bring kids" – to characterize people who "think community". Alf creates a distinction between a traditional professional setting where people do not bring children and a "community" orientation where people bring their children no matter the setting. In doing so, Alf evaluates Veronica's behavior as aligning with Asian cultural norms. Although Alf does not use the category "Asian", Alf implies the relevance of the Asian immigrant identity when stating that Veronica is "still" thinking community. This positions Veronica as an immigrant who is "still" orienting to cultural norms from her previous Asian country of residence.

Clara supports Alf through constructing a collaborative turn sequence (Lerner, 2003), where she self-selects to provide an example that justifies Alf's claim about "thinking community". Clara describes Sandra, another chamber member who brought children to a professional event. In constructing Sandra as a "lawyer" and a "millionaire", Clara flouts the economy rule, a finding of past work that illustrates participants usually use a single category when referencing a person (Stokoe, 2012). Using two categories doubly foregrounds Sandra's identity as an economically successful professional. Choosing the category "litters" – a word usually reserved for numerous offspring of animals - implies that there were too many children at a business event, thus negatively evaluating "bringing children" to a professional event. Afterward, Alf moves on to talk about strategies for member recruitment.

Although Alf and Clara do mark Veronica's and Sandra's behaviors as odd, they justify these behaviors through arguing that they align with Asian cultural values. In doing so, they manage perceived tensions between Asian cultural values and American norms for business. Interactions where AACC staff mark Asian behaviors as deviating from American professional norms and then justify these behaviors as inevitable products of "Asian culture" are common in the AACC (Shrikant, 2018). Participants' argument contributes to constituting an institutional norm for professional behavior that allows AACC members to be "Asian" and a "US business person".

In the next example, Clara constructs cultural differences between Pakistanis and other AACC members when opposing Alf's suggestion for a new event chair. Alf and Clara are nominating board members to chair an AACC event. Prior to the below excerpt, Alf suggested "Manny" as a potential candidate, and Clara evaluated Manny as "too young" and "not having enough contacts". Their argument continues below.

Example 3

```
1  Alf     Audrey was young ((laughter))
2  Clara   Audrey doesn't-
3  Alf     You can say that. She chaired before.
4  Clara   Audrey is much older than Manny.
5  Alf     What do you mean?
6  Clara   She's older than Favad too. He's young.
7  Alf     He's a lawyer.
8  Clara   You know, in the Pakistani community by the time they're twenty
9          one they're married and they look much older than their age.
```

Alf opposes Clara's point through characterizing "Audrey" as both "young" and an "event chair" (1, 3). Being "young" does not hinder category-bound activities like "chairing" an event. Clara rejects Alf's characterization of Audrey as "young" and instead characterizes Audrey as "much older". Audrey did not chair despite being young but was able to chair because she is older (and presumably has more contacts). When Alf questions Clara, she provides another example of someone younger than Audrey: Favad. Alf replies through reformulating Favad as an accomplished professional ("lawyer"). Clara ignores Alf and instead continues justifying her claim that Audrey is older than Manny and Favad. Alf and Clara are aware that both Manny and Favad are Pakistani board members. Through naming Favad, Clara is implicitly making the Pakistani category relevant. She then overtly states this category "Pakistani community" and uses the category-tied predicates, getting married young and subsequently looking older than they are, to characterize Pakistanis. Overall, Clara opposes Alf first through invoking the device of "age" as overlapping with the device of institution (young people cannot chair) and, after Alf challenges her, Clara displays knowledge about cultural difference to oppose Alf's claim about Audrey and support her own claim about Manny and Favad being young (and unqualified). Alf ultimately accepts this justification, and later in this meeting, Clara suggests her own candidate to chair the event.

Cultural Difference as a Taken-for-Granted Fact

The below examples illustrate how participants orient to cultural difference as a taken for granted fact in their institutional context. Participants' arguments display their assumptions about problems caused by cultural difference and/or how to manage them. The following two examples illustrate how participants orient to cultural difference as potentially excluding non-Asians from participating in AACC events. In the first example, Andrea – an event planner for the AACC – suggests, and then justifies, inviting a non-Asian to speak at an Asian event.

```
Example 4
1   Andrea  Yeah let's invite Amy, because even if she's not Asian, her
2           heart is [(  )
3   Clara            [She's Asian Cham- is she- Asian museum
4   Andrea  She has been promoting the Asian culture for the longest time
5           more than a lot of Asians. She has our interest at heart.
```

Andrea suggests inviting Amy, a White woman, and uses a disclaimer indicating that this suggestion to invite someone who is "not Asian" to an Asian event might be treated as a rule violation (Hewitt & Stokes, 1975). Sacks (1989) argues that "any member of any category is presumptively a representative of that category" (p. 272). Andrea's disclaimer acknowledges that Clara might orient to Amy as a typical member of the non-Asian category who, because she is not Asian, does not support Asians. Andrea argues that Amy is not a typical "non-Asian" through labeling Amy's "heart" as Asian. Clara supports Andrea's claim through naming Amy's institutional roles working with the Asian chamber and a local Asian cultural museum, thus indexing an institutional device. Andrea overlaps with Clara and uses category-tied activities – activities "treated by participants as not taken for granted and needing to be made explicit" (Reynolds & Fitzgerald, 2015, p. 99) – to justify her argument about inviting Amy to the event: "she has been promoting Asian culture" (4). Andrea constructs this activity as making Amy a better candidate to invite than Asians.

Alternatively, in the below example, Andrea opposes Clara's suggestion to ask Beth, a White woman, about women who can participate in an upcoming Women in Business panel.

Whereas Clara argues that Beth knows many important women in business, Andrea argues that

Beth would not know any "Asian and minorities" to invite to the event.

```
Example 5
1    Clara    Do you want me to send an email to Beth and see if she can
2             suggest somebody? Because I think she probably knows more
3             bigger po- like a different (.) contact
4    Andrea   Beth's uhm contacts would not be Asian and minorities
5    Clara    Ohh [okay you want to have it like-
6    Andrea       [You can ask her. We prefer Asian and minorities
7    Clara    Because then people can relate
```

Clara makes relevant the institutional device when positioning Beth as someone who

knows "bigger" business contacts (1-3). Andrea opposes Clara through positioning "contacts'" as

a device constituted by ethnic categories: Asian, minorities, and categories that are *not* Asian or

minorities. Beth does not have access to the kinds of contacts that Andrea would prefer. After

several turns, Clara voices the assumption about cultural difference underlying Andrea's

preference: people from similar backgrounds are more likely to relate to one another (7). Clara

and Andrea shift from foregrounding institutional devices to foregrounding the device of culture

and relationships among categories from different cultures. Clara and Andrea know the audience

will mostly be Asian and minority women and agree that this audience would relate to other

Asian and minority women's business experiences.

The next two examples from a meeting between the AACC and Univisión illustrate how

participants orient to cultural difference as hindering connections between Asians and Hispanics.

In the first example, Alf – the AACC president – and Cesar – a representative from Univisión –

argue about how to encourage cross-cultural connections. Prior to the excerpt, Alf asks Cesar,

"How do you find Hispanic connections with Asians?", implying that there is no natural

"connection" between the categories "Hispanic" and "Asian". Alf then argues that "Hispanics"

and "Asians" are connected because of Spain's former presence in the Philippines. Below, Alf

suggests Cesar advertise on Univisión's radio that the Asian Festival (a large, free outdoor event

with food and cultural dances hosted by the AACC) will present "it" – narratives about the

"Hispanic influence in Asia" (1). Alf argues that this narrative will persuade Hispanics to attend

the Asian festival. Cesar disagrees with Alf, argues that Hispanics like seeing different cultures,

and provides an example where Univisión advertised a Greek festival that attracted many

Hispanic attendees.

```
Example 6
1    Alf      So if you tell it on the radio that Hispanic influence in Asia
2             and they will be presenting on the Asian Festival, they'll
3             come. But they have to see something with [the Asian Festival
4    Cesar                                            [But- But you know
5             something? Uh uh uh-it's not only that. It's-that that's a-
6             that's a powerful-on the cultural side-[on the
7    Alf                                            [Cultural side
8    Cesar    =On the cultural si-
9    Alf      On the business we have so many you [-you're in Korea already]
10   Cesar                                        [on the historical side]
11            O- on the hist- on the historical side. But, culturally? We
12            are interested in seeing other culture- because what-like I
13            was telling you, the Greek festival used to advertise with us
14            in in Chicago in Spanish,
15   Alf      Mmm
16   Cesar    because they knew that uh we'll come in masses
```

Alf uses the predicate "have to see something" to characterize Hispanics ("they") (3):

Hispanics have to see connections between Hispanics and Asians to attract them to the Asian

festival. Cesar overlaps with Alf and disagrees with him: "But…it's not only that" (4-5), with

"that" referencing "seeing something". Cesar argues that seeing similarities is not the only reason

that Hispanics would attend the Asian Festival. His next utterance is a token agreement with Alf,

that "that" (seeing similarities) is "powerful on the cultural side" (5-6). Alf overlaps with Cesar,

and aligns with him through repeating "cultural side". Alf then cuts Cesar off and discusses

"business connections" between Hispanics and Asians (Hispanics own businesses in Korea, 9).

Cesar's "on the historical side" (11) seems to be a reformulation of his earlier "on the

cultural side" (6). Cesar repeats a phrase with similar syntax ("on the _____ side", 6, 8, 10, 11),

and by the time he is able to continue his disagreement with Alf, he has reformulated "cultural"

to "historical". Reformulating "cultural" to "historical" dis-aligns with Alf, and "historical" also better describes Alf's argument about connections between Asians and Hispanics. Cesar positions Alf's connection as "historical" and questions Alf's claims about "culture" (But culturally?, 11). Cesar uses "we", indexing his membership in the Hispanic community, and adds the predicate "are interested in seeing other cultures", thus disagreeing with Alf's argument that Hispanics need to see similarities. This disagreement also reformulates relationships between "Hispanics" and "other cultures". Cesar justifies this claim through invoking another membership category in the device of "culture": Greek, and explaining how Hispanics attended the Greek festival "in masses". Throughout this argument, Alf and Cesar construct different realities about cultural difference in institutional contexts. They use their orientations to cultural difference to make arguments (Alf) or oppose previous arguments (Cesar) about how Univisión should advertise the Asian festival to Hispanics.

Analysis of the excerpt below illustrates how Clara orients to cultural difference as hindering working relationships between Asians and Hispanics through discussing how the AACC built programming that successfully encouraged Hispanics to work with the AACC. Through arguing that the AACC serves Hispanics, Clara orients to the AACC's institutional goal of partnering with Univisión.

```
Example 7
1    Clara   U:m we-we're started to see the: um increase in the Hispanic
2            client as well because we started, u:m, a series last year. How
3            to series. How to start your own restaurant, how to start, u:m
4            you know your own beauty salo:n, and this year we gonna do how to
5            start your retail business online and offline. So because we
6            becoming more specific we see lot more, um, Hispanic community
7            coming in. We gonna do-
8    Cesar   Do you do those in Spanish? Or
9    Clara   No
10   Cesar   oh you do it in English.
11   Clara   We do it in English
12   Cesar   Okay
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13   Clara   U:m. We're gonna do how to start your um car mechanic shops and I
14           think that-you know like depending on the topic. We do everything
15           in English. U:m, unfortunately right now we don't have any staff
16           that speak Spanish but-
17   Cesar   Everything you mention I have an uncle or an aunt that does it
18   Clara   Right.
19   Cesar   ((laughter))
20   Clara   Beauty salo(hhh)n yeah ((laughter))
```

Clara names "Hispanic clients", and "clients" positions Hispanics in the institutional device. Clara argues that the AACC has seen an increase in Hispanic clients because the AACC started a series of workshops (2). Clara argues that because these workshops are "specific", they are attracting members of the "Hispanic community" (6). Clara constructs the Hispanic community as in part, defined by their interest in these kinds of workshops. Cesar cuts off Clara and asks if the classes are taught in Spanish. In doing so, Cesar makes relevant a different characteristic of the Hispanic community. "Speaking Spanish" is a category-bound activity for "Hispanics", that occurs outside of institutional contexts as well. Through mentioning language, Cesar positions Hispanics in the device of culture. Clara replies no and clarifies that the workshops are in English.

Although Cesar accepts this answer ("okay", 12), Clara later justifies the choice of instruction for workshops (14). Using an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986), Clara states that the AACC does "everything in English", thus positioning English language as the norm and not a way the AACC attempts to exclude non-English speakers. Clara provides an account for all AACC events being in English: currently the AACC does not have Spanish-speaking staff. Clara's "but" suggests that she will discuss how the AACC plans to remedy this in the future. Clara orients to offering classes in English as an activity that could be perceived as exclusive and explains that it is not, thus meeting her goals to preserve relationships with Cesar and Univisión. Cesar cuts Clara off, shifts the subject away from language of instruction in the

workshop, and instead supports Clara's previous argument about Hispanics being attracted to specific workshops. Cesar indexes his identity as a Hispanic and names categories within the device of family (aunt & uncle) that "do" the jobs that Clara listed. Cesar follows with laughter, and Clara and Cesar then collaborate in adding to the list and with laughter. Doing so helps Cesar and Clara maintain friendly relationships and avoid a potentially sensitive situation. Here, participants move the category Hispanic between institutional (i.e., Hispanic clients) and cultural (i.e., speaking Spanish, Cesar's ethnicity, his family) devices in ways that maintain relationships between the Clara and Cesar, and more broadly, the organizations they represent.

The final example illustrates how Alf orients to cultural difference as dividing the AACC's ethnically diverse membership through arguing that workshops should be offered separately to separate ethnicities. Doing so, Alf argues, will bring members together as "Asians" because of their mutual institutional interest in the business seminars. Before the below excerpt, Alf discussed how a Vietnamese member who started a beauty salon is getting her own TV show on a new Asian cable network. Alf argues that the AACC should ask her to lead a seminar on how to start a salon.

```
Example 8
1    Alf      If we have a successful business seminar with her on how to do
2             salon
3    Candace  Yeah
4    Alf      uh salon. Whenever you have a success you duplicate it. Don't
5             just let it slide and then [oh thank you goodbye.
6    Candace                             [Right
7    Alf      You can duplicate by going to the Korean [community
8    Clara                                             [right
9    Alf      Philippine okay? They can also learn about how to do salon or
10            beauty or spa or whatever
11   Clara    Right Right
12   Alf      Because she is more a consulting business
13   Clara    Mhm
14   Alf      And then probably create that movement within ou:r, local Asian
15            communities on the beauty salon or spa.
```

Alf argues that the Vietnamese entrepreneur should lead a "successful business seminar" on starting a beauty salon and supports this argument by constructing a category-bound activity associated with good business people: duplicating success. Thus far, Alf indexes the institutional categorization device. Then, Alf adds specific category-bound activities that would duplicate success in this context: "going to the Korean community" and the "Philippine". Alf constructs intersections between cultural and institutional devices through constructing different cultural identities as separate and therefore needing different seminars on the same topic. Alf's orientation to cultural difference as dividing Asian cultural groups is supported by observations of the AACC. AACC members have adopted the "Asian" category because it is a useful way to be recognizable to non-Asians. However, outside of the AACC, they work and socialize with members of their own ethnic groups.

Alf constructs a standardized relational pair (Stokoe, 2012) of "teacher-pupil" through using the category-bound activity "they can also learn" to characterize the Korean and Philippine communities. Alf re-constructs these categories as part of the same community, where Vietnamese category has "moral obligations" (p. 281) to help other categories learn about starting a beauty salon. Alf then predicts that offering a workshop to some Asian ethnicities will encourage other "local Asian communities" to start beauty salons or spas as well. Alf orients to "Asian communities" as a device that encompasses many ethnicities. This move also helps reposition separate ethnicities as connected to one another. Overall, Alf's reconstruction of relationships among Asian ethnicities orients to his institutional role as AACC president who tries to preserve an "Asian" identity for members.

Discussion

This article highlights the agency of participants to orient to cultural difference in a variety of ways that serve interactional goals and constitute institutional contexts. Unlike previous research analyzing cultural difference in workplace contexts, these findings illustrate that cultural difference is not a pre-existing entity that causes workplace miscommunication (Beamer, 1992; Mao & Hale, 2015) nor is it necessarily oriented to by participants solely as a source of inequality (Chen et al., 2015; Murphy, 2013). Instead, these findings highlight how orientations to cultural difference routinely occur during mundane institutional interactions. Using membership categorization analysis, this article illustrates that cultural difference is a discursive phenomenon that emerges through the ways participants use and organize categories, predicates, activities, and devices during arguments.

This article's findings extend MCA as a theoretical and methodological approach for studying cultural difference through highlighting how participants' orientations to cultural difference accomplish rhetorical goals common in argument and constitute institutional contexts. Previous studies that use MCA to analyze cultural difference highlight how participants construct cultural differences among membership categories in interpersonal contexts in ways that orient to relational goals, such as making friends or displaying expertise (Arano, 2019; Brandt & Jenks, 2011; Fukuda, 2006; Mori, 2003; Nishizaka, 1995; Zimmerman, 2007). This study extends findings through showing how, in addition to constructing cultural differences, participants oriented to cultural difference as a pre-existing, taken for granted fact that could potentially hinder relationships among different cultural groups. Participants used both ways of orienting to cultural difference as resources for building, supporting, or opposing their own or others' arguments about institutionally related activities, identities, or relationships.

Participants construct cultural differences to justify their claims or oppose others' claims about institutional norms and identities. For example, Clara and Stephanie construct cultural differences in finance as related to refugees' capability as business people and Alf reconstructs an awkward professional's behavior as justifiable through explaining that bringing children aligns with Asian cultural values. Participants accepted constructions of cultural difference as more persuasive and reasonable than other argumentative moves. For example, Alf rejects gender as an explanation for why a woman brought children to an event and instead provides a cultural explanation, which is supported by Clara. Similarly, Clara draws on cultural difference of Pakistanis to convince Alf that his suggested board members are too young to chair an event.

Participants display their orientations to cultural difference as a pre-existing fact through ways they make and have arguments. When making arguments, participants orient to viewpoints that have not been spoken but design their arguments in ways that address those viewpoints (Schiffrin, 1985). Participants name categories, display the assumption that these categories are divided by cultural difference, and reconstruct relationships among these categories in ways orient to institutional goals. Clara, for example, makes an argument that Hispanics are attracted to programs provided by the AACC, which indirectly addresses the assumption that Hispanics would not attend the events of an Asian American organization. Alf orients to different Asian ethnicities as requiring different seminars (because of cultural differences), then constructs a collaborative relations between one ethnicity (Vietnamese) who will teach the others (Koreans, Filipino), and finally argues that doing so will help create a movement among "Asians".

Participants also use cultural difference to oppose arguments. Andrea uses cultural difference as a resource when opposing Clara's suggestion for inviting Beth to nominate speakers for their event (Beth is not Asian so would not know Asians or minorities), and Clara

readily accepts this claim. Alf and Cesar agree that cultural difference exists, but oppose one another on what cultural difference implies about relationships between different cultural groups. Alf builds an argument constructing cultural groups as needing to see similarities, and Cesar opposes Alf through constructing cultural groups as appreciating cultural difference.

Across these examples, participants' orientations to cultural difference indexed institutional contexts through routinely moving between the devices of "culture" and "institution". For example, Andrea and Clara (examples 4 & 5) shift back and forth between invoking the device of "culture" and "institution" when discussing Beth's and Amy's connection to Asians. On the one hand, both Amy and Beth are qualified businesswomen (institutional device), yet Beth's white contacts would not be as relatable to Asian and minority audiences (cultural device). Amy's "heart", however, is Asian, and therefore Amy is relatable to Asian audiences (cultural device). Through routinely moving between the devices of institution and culture, participants' arguments construct a reality (Hutchby, 2013) where cultural difference is inseparable from institutional contexts. This institutional reality shaped the way participants engage in arguments (Hutchby, 2013). Arguments with non-AACC members, like Stephanie, were constituted by more indirect, mitigating moves (example 1), whereas arguments among AACC staff were more direct (examples 2&3). Although constructing cultural differences is a sensitive activity (Arano, 2019), this data shows how AACC institutional norms enable participants to make direct, unmitigated arguments about cultural difference with one another.

Study limitations and conclusion

The strengths of this study lie in its close analysis of how participants orient to cultural difference during everyday argument in institutional interactions. However, this study focused on one organization, and the characteristics of this organization shape the kinds of findings

obtained. For example, this organization is a chamber of commerce, and therefore overtly focuses on business development and not, for example, activism. Furthermore, as a small business working with other locally tied businesses, the ways participants discuss cultural difference is particular to the kinds of populations found in this Texas city, and more broadly reflect racial categories common in the United States. In addition, this organization contained Asian American immigrant members who are relatively well-educated professional workers in the United States. Future work can analyze how communication might differ in organizations with different goals, located in a different country, or including members of different populations.

Despite these limitations, this study provides empirical evidence illustrating that MCA is a useful theoretical and methodological framework to tease out the complexities of intercultural communication in workplace interactions. Findings, because they emerge from actual conversations, closely mirror the ways that cultural difference surfaces in this institutional context. Taking seriously the ways participants construct and organize categories, predicates, activities, and devices provides insight into the nuanced, complex ways that cultural difference appears as a routine, taken-for-granted phenomenon that constitutes institutional life.

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Appendix: Transcription Conventions

(modified from Jefferson, 2004)

꞉	Stretched sound, more colons demonstrate longer stretches
__	Underline indicate emphasis
↑	Indicates raised intonation
[ ]	Overlapping talk, [indicates beginning of overlap;] indicates end
−	An abrupt stop in speaking
=	Contiguous utterance
(( ))	Contains analysts comments, label nonverbal activities
?	Rising inflection
·	Fall in tone
،	Continuing intonation
( )	Unclear or inaudible speech
(hhh)	Hearable exhalation