



Syddansk Universitet

The ecology of intercultural interaction

Steffensen, Sune Vork; Uryu, Michiko; Kramsch, Claire

Published in:
Language Sciences

DOI:
[10.1016/j.langsci.2013.08.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langsci.2013.08.006)

Publication date:
2014

Document version
Submitted manuscript

Citation for pulished version (APA):

Steffensen, S. V., Uryu, M., & Kramsch, C. (2014). The ecology of intercultural interaction: Timescales, temporal ranges and identity dynamics. *Language Sciences*, 41A, 41-59. DOI: 10.1016/j.langsci.2013.08.006

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Language Sciences

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/langsci

The ecology of intercultural interaction: timescales, temporal ranges and identity dynamics



Michiko Uryu ^{a,*}, Sune V. Steffensen ^b, Claire Kramsch ^a

^a UC, Berkeley, United States

^b University of Southern Denmark, Denmark

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Intercultural communication
Ecological linguistics
Dialogical systems
Timescales
Post-constructivist identity
Historicity

ABSTRACT

This article contributes to the ecolinguistic research agenda in two ways: first, it introduces a distinct ecological approach to intricacies of intercultural interaction, emphasizing the multiple voices, subjectivities and historicities that meet and mesh in such encounters. Second, it introduces an ecological model of timescales that allows ecological language scientists to adopt a naturalized position in order to show how temporal patterns crisscross complex empirical data; the key word is that of *temporal ranges*, i.e. ranges of timescales constrained by the same organizing principle. Using this model, we describe a principled method for extracting temporal patterns, historicities and sociocultural voices in complex empirical data. Our example is “another” Thanksgiving dinner (cf. Tannen, 1984) where a German, a Russian and two Japanese women interact in a US context. Our analysis shows how past events (e.g. the spread of the Ottoman Empire, Germany and Japan during World War II, Russian–American relations during the cold war, and the election of cardinal Joseph Ratzinger as pope in 2005) become powerful constraints on the interactional dynamics between the interlocutors, as they use these events to project and mold their dialogical and social identities, vis-à-vis each other and the researcher. At the end of the article, we present an ecological view on identity, and we discuss the role of the researcher in an ecological paradigm.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Homo sapiens sapiens is a thoroughly encultured species. From birth, even from conception, culture constrains and conditions our human forms of life. As culture shapes our bodies and our relationships, it immerses us and our children into specific cultural habits of being and languaging with one another. From an ecolinguistic point of view, it therefore becomes an urgent research question to ask how culture conditions our ecological existence: what do cultures do to us, to our relationships, and to the world that we inhabit? What happens to us, as we enter the Heideggerian house of language, while language simultaneously leaks into our biological being?

This article contributes to the ecolinguistic agenda by exploring how culture conditions human co-existence. We approach the cultural complexities of the human existence by adopting as our object the even more complex phenomenon of intercultural interaction. Our rationale behind adopting intercultural interaction as our object in an ecological context is that it requires human beings to interrelate via different cultural constraints. With Edgar Morin (1987: 28), we can say that the intercultural interaction has its particular *dia-logics*, i.e. it creates a unity, not through merging or assimilation,

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: michikouryu@gmail.com (M. Uryu).

but through the interplay of complementary, competitive, and antagonistic cultural logics. An ecological approach to intercultural interaction thus contrasts with the usual view that attributes difficulties in intercultural interaction to a lack of a common language and common cultural assumptions among the interlocutors. In the latter view, it is believed that intercultural understanding can be fostered by more information about and greater tolerance towards the cultural Other, by a willingness and an ability to see the world and oneself from the other's perspective, and, in general, by a willingness to interact and enter into dialog with speakers from different cultures (Byram, 1997; Hu and Byram, 2009). Some scholars like Willis Edmondson and Juliane House have argued that the concept of “intercultural learning” is superfluous, because communicative competence already covers the expression, interpretation and negotiation of meaning necessary to bring about understanding across cultures (Edmondson and House, 1998). Both communicative competence and intercultural learning are predicated on a modernist notion of speech and culture. In a modernist view, people say what they mean and mean what they say, their speech refers to a stable world of objective truths, these truths can be negotiated through rational argument and information exchange and people get to accept and respect each other on the basis of that information.

However, the rapid globalization of the economy, the spread of global information technologies, and the increase in human migration have catapulted intercultural interaction out of modernity. It has entered a late modern phase, where people speak the same language but mean different things, indeed it is not always clear they really mean what they say: the words they speak are not necessarily theirs, and the memories these words evoke are not necessarily shared. In this late modern world, it has become more difficult to distinguish what is specifically one's own and what is the foreign culture. Through the internet and mass media, people's cultures, histories, memories, aspirations are now imbricated in one another. While inherently embedded in ecological reality, utterances, actions, and events acquire their meaning in non-linear, historically and culturally contingent ways that depend on the particular beings' point of views and subject positions in time and space.

On this basis, an ecological approach rejects modernist and structuralist theories of intercultural interaction, as they are unable to capture the cultural, societal and emotional complexity of cross-cultural encounters. Rather, we have to draw on more ecological theories, just as we need to develop a more complex practice of engaging with interculturally constrained processes and activities. On the backdrop of post-structuralist discourse approach, as advocated by Blommaert (2005), this article takes a step towards a conception of intercultural interaction that draws on dynamical and complexity theory (e.g. Larsen-Freeman and Cameron, 2008; Hodges and Fowler, 2010, 2011), on ecological linguistics (e.g. Fill and Mühlhäuser, 2001; Steffensen and Fill, 2013; Kramsch, 2002, 2007; Kramsch and Whiteside, 2008; Kramsch and Steffensen, 2008), and on distributed approaches to language (Cowley, 2007, 2009, 2011a; Cowley et al., 2010; Hodges et al., 2012).

Significantly, these approaches discard the modernist illusion of language being a cultural vehicle for representational meaning. They deny the existence of a ‘language system’ that can be ‘used’ by the ‘language user’, and they reject the “code-view on language” (Harris, 1998; Love, 2004), i.e. the view that language functions through processes of encoding and decoding meaning into and from wording. Rather, an ecological–dynamical approach takes a starting point in the dynamics of human existence. Hence, utterance-activity (Cowley, 1998) rises from our bodily experiences and emotions, our actions, activities and interpersonal relations. With Love (1990) and Thibault (2011), we can refer to the lived activity as *first-order languaging*, i.e. “whole-body sense-making activity that enables persons to engage with each other in forms of coaction and to integrate themselves with and to take part in social activities that may be performed either solo or together with other agents” (Thibault, 2011: 215). In contrast, “what most people, including linguists, think of as language” (Thibault, 2011: 216) is *second-order language*, i.e. “stabilized cultural patterns on longer, slower cultural timescales” (Thibault, 2011: 216). These lexicogrammatical patterns function as attractors for our first-order languaging, and they are hence “integrated with the first-order dynamics in ways that facilitate coordination between persons and between persons and aspects of their worlds and interpretation” (Thibault, 2011: 232). An ecological approach, accordingly, seeks to understand language and sense-making in a wider context of human co-existence.

This article draws on a study conducted by Michiko Uryu, who studied the practices of an American non-profit organization founded 50 years ago to foster “cultural and social exchange” among female international visitors at American universities (Uryu, 2009). Our analysis exploits the fact that (intercultural) interaction takes place in complex, dynamical systems which Steffensen (2012) refers to as *dialogical systems*. Dialogical systems share properties with other dynamical systems, and we exploit this fact by adopting a complexity theoretical focus on the *timescales* involved in intercultural interaction. The theoretical underpinnings of this approach will be outlined in Section 2. Section 3 opens with a presentation of object and method, before it turns to our analysis of (some of) the complexities of an instance of intercultural interaction. Finally, we sketch how our complexity-based, ecological approach gives rise to a post-constructivist conception of intercultural and interactional identity, of as well participants (Section 4) as researchers (Section 5).

2. The temporal dynamics of ecological and dialogical systems

In the tradition of Conversation Analysis, analysts attempt to analyze data from “the participants' perspective, from which the individuals involved in social action interpret what is happening moment by moment in their interaction” (Liddicoat, 2011: 73). From an ecological point of view, such an approach may achieve *descriptive adequacy*, e.g. by establishing that a participant in a conversation orients to another participant's utterance as a violation of social norms. But the approach does not achieve *explanatory adequacy* in that it cannot tell us *why* that particular social norm has emerged, nor why that particular utterance counts as a violation of social normativity.

The reason is that human interaction is not just conditioned by the dynamics of the turn-taking as experienced from a participant perspective; rather, it involves a full spectrum of temporal dynamics, and for reasons to be explained below one simply cannot regard any single timescale (neither that of neural processing nor that of turn-taking) as more decisive than others. To the ecological interaction analyst, human interaction plays out on *multiple timescales* which makes it an ecologically complex phenomenon. But what does it mean to say that human interaction plays out on multiple timescales? Often this is interpreted as if time is multi-tiered, and the phenomenon in question, here human interaction, unfolds simultaneously on each tier, comparable to how a symphonic piece of music unfolds on various tiers in the score, or how annotation software like ELAN models interaction as analytical tiers. This approach appears, amongst others, in Larsen-Freeman and Cameron's (2008: 169) overview:

The timescales relevant to face-to-face conversation between two people are:

- the mental processing timescale of milliseconds
- the microgenetic timescale of online talk
- the discourse event timescale [...]
- the series of connected discourse events [...]
- the ontogenetic scale of an individual's life, and
- the phylogenetic timescale

Such a tiered time model can be critiqued on various grounds. For instance, Larsen-Freeman and Cameron make no attempt to explain why these very timescales are the salient ones in their descriptive framework. They do neither explain, in what sense these scales are relevant, nor which other scales are real but irrelevant to face-to-face conversation. Most importantly, Larsen-Freeman and Cameron do not explain what it accounts for to say that these timescales operate on human interaction.

A similar tiered view on time appears in Lemke (2000: 277) who operates with 24 timescales ranging from 10^{-5} s ("Neurotransmitter synthesis") to 10^{18} s ("Cosmological processes"). Lemke's hierarchy is a useful heuristic, but it has its weaknesses. For instance, when Lemke takes the second as the base of his model, he arbitrarily adopts the ancient Babylonian and Egyptians astronomers' dependence on sexagesimal counting (as well as their partitioning of the day into 24 h). Likewise, Lemke adopts the mathematical regularity of 10^n , 10^{n+1} , 10^{n+2} , etc. For instance, Lemke defines a period of 11.5 days, i.e. 10^6 s, as a "Thematic, functional unit." Though he readily admits that this unit is "rare" (!), it remains unclear how it contributes to our understanding of time, and it appears to be a by-product of a particular combination of the decimal, the tetravigesimal and the sexagesimal system.

Both Larsen-Freeman and Cameron's and Lemke's models build on what Salthe (1991: 252f.) terms a *scalar hierarchy*. Scalar hierarchies are heuristic devices for describing metonymic part-whole relations, for instance when structural linguistics describes a nested hierarchy of such units as the phoneme, the morpheme, the word, the sentence, the paragraph, the text, the discourse, etc. Salthe provides us with an important insight into the dynamics of scalar hierarchies, namely that when it comes to natural systems (e.g. living systems), one does not need to attend to more than three scales at a time: the so-called *focal scale* L which is the middle of a group of three levels where the other two levels are L + 1 and L – 1.¹ Salthe (1991: 252) comments:

Behavior at the focal level is derived from "initiating conditions" arising from the dynamics of systems nested at a lower scale [L – 1] within those at the focal level. Focal behavior, is moreover, regulated by boundary conditions operating at the next (and still higher) scalar level(s) above the focal level.

Salthe contrasts scalar hierarchies with another type, namely *specification hierarchies*, and we will soon get back to this point.

2.1. A complexity-theoretical approach to timescales

Our approach to timescales is enlightened by another ecological tradition, namely that in psychology (cf. Van Orden et al., 2003; Van Orden and Holden, 2002), which has reached major insights into how human behavior is temporally patterned. As a starting point, one can establish that a "timescale" is a heuristic device that serves an epistemological purpose, and as such it constitutes an observer's perspective on the object in question. It is a *post hoc* description of temporal patterns in a data set. Thus, a small data set, i.e. a set consisting of few data points, exhibits fewer timescales than a data set consisting of many data points, irrespective of duration of the data set. For instance, Van Orden et al.'s (2003) reaction time experiment included 1100 trials collected in less than an hour, while Delignières et al.'s (2004) study of self-esteem included 1024 data points collected over 512 days. In these studies, temporal patterns can be modeled using different sample sizes: one can model sequences of 10 trials, yielding one temporal pattern, one can model sequences of 100 trials, yielding another temporal pattern, and one can model sequences of 1000 trials, yielding yet another temporal pattern. It is in this sense, that there are different timescales operating in the data set. Accordingly, "one cannot resolve systematic variation on timescales faster than the pace of data measurement" (Van Orden et al., 2003: 338) for which reason "the pace of data collection sets an entry level into the body's [or whatever the data set relates to] temporal hierarchy" (Van Orden et al., 2003: 346). Thus, strictly speaking "time-

¹ Lemke (2000) uses the notation of N, N + 1 and N – 1, rather than L.

scales” do not refer to the temporal extension (the duration) of any given event. If we in principle had access to methods that yielded infinitely many data points during a measurement, we could elicit indefinitely many timescales operating in the event, however short it was. Thus, it is unwarranted to claim an absolute set of timescales, independent of observation and measurement.²

Likewise, it is unwarranted to claim that phenomenon X unfolds on the single timescale Y, at least if X is, or depends on, one or more living systems. It will *always* be the case that such phenomena unfold on many timescales, because “living systems self-organize to stay near critical states” (Van Orden et al., 2003: 333), in the sense that “To one or the other side of the critical value, the model system exhibits one or the other kind of behavior” (Van Orden et al., 2003: 332). Phenomenologically, this state near the critical value appears to us as the possibility of a *choice*, i.e. adaptive behavior, which is the very hallmark of living systems. Leaving details aside, the compressed argument is that such a system is governed by interaction-dominant dynamics which produce “statistically self-similar, positively correlated, background noise” (Van Orden et al., 2003: 335), which is the dynamical systems jargon for the property of temporal patterns on multiple timescales. Living systems are therefore irreducible to single timescales.

The consequence of this ecological and dynamical take on timescales is that we are forced to discard the metaphor of *temporal tiers*: we cannot uphold the view that for instance a conversation unfolds on a specific ‘conversational’ timescale – or a “discourse event timescale” – simply because face-to-face conversation is embodied interactivity, and “Timescales of embodiment compose a hierarchy ranging from glacial scales of evolution to online kinematics” (Van Orden et al., 2003: 347). Thus, what Larsen-Freeman and Cameron and Lemke present is a hierarchy of “shallow time” defined by duration: a social organization has a longer duration than a conversation that has a longer duration than an utterance that has a longer duration than a syllable that has a longer duration than a neural firing, etc., etc. In Salthe’s terms, this is a scalar hierarchy, and at best it equips us with a systematic framework for describing various influential factors in human interaction (as illustrated by Larsen-Freeman and Cameron’s (2008: 165ff.) example). At worst it becomes a trivial insight that our very life is temporally stretched.

The radical alternative to “shallow time” is “deep time.” Deep time implies, for instance, that even the shortest sequence of human interaction is enabled and constrained by evolution, just like it contributes to an evolutionary timescale. From a biological point of view, this is not surprising: though we have learnt to talk about evolution as if it takes thousands and millions of years, it does after all depend on genetic mutations on a very fast timescale and on natural selection on the ontogenic scale of individual existence. Evolution is a process that is continuous and perpetual, and so the full range from the fastest neural or cellular processes to the differentiation of species is part of evolution. Deep time portrays a universe of infinitely intermeshed and interpenetrating processes, somewhat like a mathematical fractal pattern that continuously plays out on each and any timescale.

In itself, the deep time metaphor is as uninformative as the shallow time view. Just like a mathematical fractal is a purely formal entity which is never found in nature, so does infinite deep time only exist in the realm of pure, holistic models, which is more often found in spiritual discourses than in science. An ecological, dynamical take on timescales requires limits on infinity in order to balance between deep and shallow time. The first step towards an ecological approach to timescales is Van Orden et al.’s (2003: 334) observation that, unlike mathematical fractals, “Natural fractals display a rougher, more irregular form of self-similarity, statistical self-similarity, across a limited range of scales.” That fractal patterns are self-similar means that “They repeat similar features across nested scales of space or time” (Van Orden et al., 2003: 333).

The advantage of operating with self-similarity is that it accentuates the explanatory power of a single organizing principle that plays out on various timescales. Thus, any natural fractal defines a range of timescales where the same organizing principle is operating. We refer to such a “range of timescales” as a *temporal range*. Accordingly, the *extension* of the temporal range (i.e. the section of nested timescales comprised by the temporal range) is determined by an *organizing principle*. Thus, in contrast to timescales which depend on an observer’s perspective, temporal ranges model real ecological dynamics in ecological systems. Fig. 1 is a heuristic model that illustrates how a nested hierarchy of temporal ranges emerges, *pari passu* with the emergence of new organizational principles.

In the vertical dimension, Fig. 1 depicts a continuum from slow/long to fast/short timescales, typically depicted as waves with longer or shorter frequencies. In the horizontal dimension, it depicts the various temporal ranges. What the model illustrates is that with each additional organizing principle, the temporal range is *narrower* (i.e. it comprises fewer timescales) and *more complex* (i.e. it is governed by more organizing principles). For instance, it is agreed upon that a limited set of organizational principles holds sway in the physical world which stretches from the largest galactic events to the tiniest subatomic happenings. Within the full array of this temporal range constrained by physical principles, *life* has emerged, governed by the organizing principle of *metabolism*. While life evidently depends on physical processes, it is more complex and has a narrower temporal range: life is younger than the universe, and it will cease to exist before the end of the universe.

Returning to Salthe’s distinction between scalar hierarchies and specification hierarchies, we can now add that our model establishes a *specification hierarchy of temporal ranges*. A specification hierarchy establishes an asymmetry within a more general (more simple) and a more specific (more complex) level. For instance, “all living systems, are, at their least specified, ‘merely’ physical systems, but not all physical systems are living” (Salthe, 1991: 254). Thus, “generally, the lower [level] is

² For the same reason, it is unwarranted to ontologically reify the timescales, as Larsen-Freeman (2002: 40) does when she asks “what connects the different levels of scale in the nested system?”

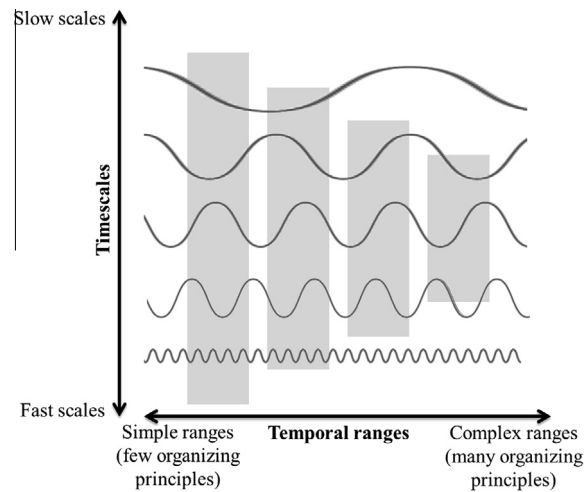


Fig. 1. The emergence of temporal ranges.

viewed as giving rise to the higher, which after emerging, integrates it, and also implies it" (Salthe, 1991). While scalar hierarchies in principle are open-ended in both directions (on the vertical dimension in Fig. 1), specification hierarchies are truncated in both ends (on the horizontal dimension). In the general/simple end, the truncation amounts to a claim that there is nothing beyond that level, *in casu* nothing beyond the physical level. This is part of ecological thinking because it rests on a materialist or physicalist ontology. In the specific/complex end, the truncation "reflects the nature of the observer" (Salthe, 1991): for instance, while the psychologist can describe a human being in terms of motivation and behavior, the anatomist can ignore these levels of specificity and focus on the those dynamics of the human body that we share with other species.

As Salthe observes (1991: 255), specification hierarchies play a prominent role in developmental models, because the more specific level is seen as emerging from the more general. This is also the case in our model, where the *organizing principle* is an interim heuristic that describes the self-organizing dynamics that drive development. In general, each emergent temporal range presupposes the previous one(s), and it defines a domain within which processes are more complex because they abide a higher number of organizing principles. Unsurprisingly, *complexity* is thus the order parameter of evolution. In other words, the increasingly narrowing of the temporal range entails still more complex (physical, biological and behavioral) processes to be observed, i.e. processes with a higher degree of variability, because they are increasingly unconstrained by very slow and very fast timescales.

2.2. Temporal ranges and timescales in intercultural interaction

Having thus outlined our general model of ecological "deep time," we now turn to the temporal dynamics of intercultural interaction. The very purpose of raising this question is that we are faced with the question of how the more general and trans-situational (the intercultural domain) interact with the more specific and situated (the interactional domain)? This question relates to how we understand the relation between two adjacent temporal ranges.

Our starting point is a reinterpretation of the *adiabatic principle* as put forward by Jay Lemke to explain the dynamics in a scalar hierarchy. According to this principle, "the faster something happens, the less energy is transferred. Conversely, very slowly varying processes appear as a stable background on the timescale of faster ones" (Lemke, 2000: 279). While Lemke applies the adiabatic principle on timescale relations in the scalar hierarchy, we apply it to the relation between two temporal ranges in the specification hierarchy. In this context, the principle implies that physical processes beyond the temporal range of life (e.g. galactic and subatomic processes) do not transfer energy to living systems; these are largely unaffected by changes on the timescales outside the temporal range of life. However, while life unfolds on a narrower temporal range, it is more complex, because it is constrained by more organizing principles than physics.

The main difference between the shallow and the deep view on time is that the ecological approach pivots on *temporal ranges*, not single timescales. Accordingly, we will now present a particular specification hierarchy of temporal ranges. While in principle, such a hierarchy can be ascertained through a careful examination of the emergence of different governing principles in the period from the big bang to now, for now we rely on a more intuitive model, presented in Fig. 2 which takes us from the general level of the physical universe over the focal level of a conversation in a dialogical system, and to the specific level of the individual human being's awareness.

Fig. 2 exhibits the same two dimensions as Fig. 1. But in addition it shows six temporal ranges (ranging from simple to complex), as well as a number of timescales. On the left hand we have a broad temporal range defined by *physical* principles which govern everything from intergalactic processes to subatomic movements. Within physical constraints, *life* emerged

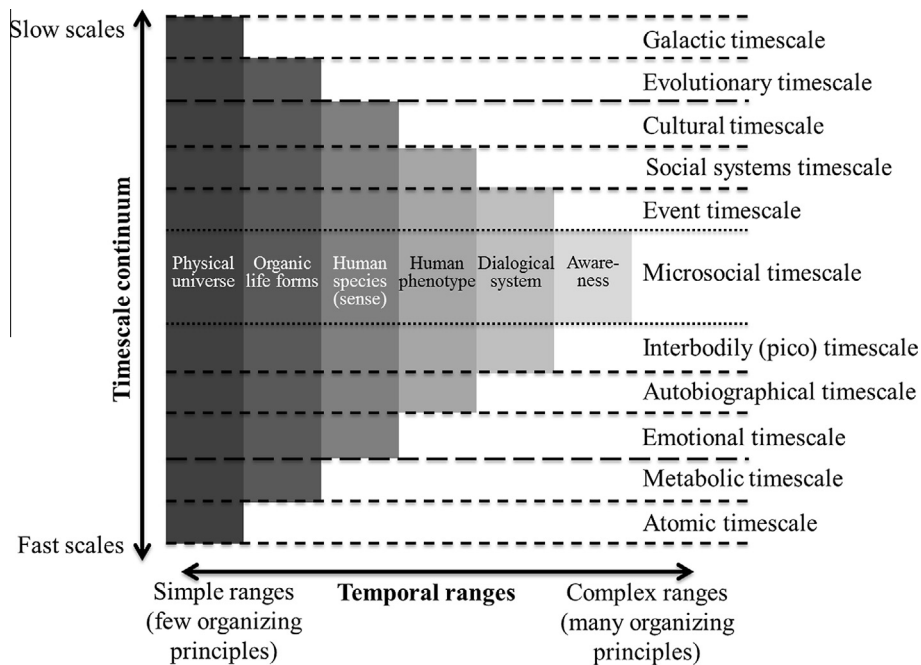


Fig. 2. Temporal ranges and nested timescales: a specification hierarchy.

some 3.5 billion years ago. Life has as its organizing principle the emergence of robust metabolic constraints which profiles a temporal range that, according to the adiabatic principle, is unaffected by larger galactic and smaller subatomic events. With life arose a plenitude of species, and one of them developed the capacity of sense-saturated interactivity (Steffensen, 2013) which gave them access to an *extended ecology* (Steffensen, 2009, 2011). *Sense* emerged as an organizing principle which functioned as a powerful constraint on biological behavior, and as such it brings forth a cultural domain within which we live our lives. Thus, *ontogenetically*, each of us is born into a sense-saturated universe, while we of course do not cease to be living, physical beings. Further along the hierarchy of temporal ranges, we enter and exit dialogical systems (Steffensen, 2012), i.e. functional wholes that pivot on our interbodily coordination. A large part of this coordination can be tracked to our biological capacity for bodily coordination and synchronization (cf. Trevarthen, 1998; Bråten, 2009; Fowler et al., 2008). It is thus a species-specific trait that our biology is not individual, but deeply interdependent with other human beings around us. Finally, a small fragment of this coordination depends on how our *awareness* allows us to control our bodily behavior, so we can produce bodily and vocal gestures that allow our interlocutors to achieve a phenomenological experience of interpreting meaning and thus of understanding us. With Cowley's (2011b) term, within this narrow temporal range we take a *language stance* that has an immense impact on our interbodily, coordinative behavior. In other words, awareness becomes an organizing principle for a part of human coordination.

By operating with temporal ranges which are orthogonal on the progression of time, we can now define a limited set of *timescales*. Thus, the adiabatic principle leads us to assume that two adjacent temporal ranges are *symmetric*, i.e. the more simple (broader) temporal range comprises timescales that are *both slower and faster* than the more complex (narrower) temporal range. Thus, a timescale can be defined as a zone on the timescale continuum that is comprised by the temporal range N , but *not* comprised by the temporal range $N + 1$. This approach generates a *principled* set of timescales, in contrast to Larsen-Freeman and Cameron's more intuitively defined hierarchy. Further, as the more complex temporal range is defined in terms of an organizing principle that is relative to the focal scale in question, and not uniformly defined in terms of duration, this model is more coherent than Lemke's scalar hierarchy.

The perhaps greatest insight generated by this model is that, because it depends on natural fractals, it suggests that there is self-similarity between the timescales *within* a temporal range. Thus, rather than ponder on why or how emotional and cultural phenomena relate to each other, our model traces this (self)-similarity to how sense becomes a governing principle in human existence. The long/slow timescales of *culture* resonates with the short/fast timescales of *emotions*, simply because they are defined by the same organizing principle, that of human sense-making, and because they emerge from the same temporal range. Furthermore, this temporal range comprises the temporal range of the individual's ontogenesis and our interbodily coordination in dialogical systems. Thus, culture and emotions reverberate in our life trajectories and in our interpersonal meetings, just like our autobiographic memory and the social systems we are part of play out in our conversations (cf. Steffensen, 2012). Essentially, when it comes to understanding the dynamics of timescales, the temporal ranges model show us that the slow is an integral part of the fast.

3. “Another” Thanksgiving dinner

Having outlined our ecological framework for conceptualizing timescales, we now turn to the empirical part of the article. As mentioned, we derive our empirical work from a study made by Michiko Uryu (2009). Uryu’s study included the tape-recording of a 30 min long conversation between four international spouses: one German (Bianka), one Russian (Olga) and two Japanese (Kayo and Michiko, the researcher).³ All four are highly educated women, holding M.A. and Ph.D. degrees or the equivalent. Bianka is 63 from Munster in the northwestern part of Germany. She came to the US in 2005. Olga is 45 years old from Moscow. She has been in the US for over 15 years. Kayo is 42 and comes from Osaka. A professional architect, she moved to the US in 2001, after studying two years at Harvard for her master’s degree and earned her Ph.D. at Kobe University in Japan. Michiko is 36 years old, and comes from Nagasaki. She came to the US in 2000 to pursue her studies in educational linguistics. Although all participants speak English with ease, they are not native speakers of American English. In this article, we focus on a 5 min excerpt from this conversation.

The conversation took place during a Thanksgiving dinner organized by the above mentioned non-profit organization on November 15, 2006. The Thanksgiving dinner was organized as an international gathering of foreign spouses at an American university on the East Coast, and it was planned under the theme: “An American holiday, Thanksgiving.”⁴ Uryu (2009) describes the scene as follows:

The goal of the meeting was to “(1) Socialize, make friends, and practice English, (2) Learn about the town, the state, and New England, (3) Learn about other nations and cultures, (4) Learn about America and our traditions, and (5) Feel at home.” That morning, approximately 20 people showed up, including six local and foreign coordinators and other foreign members. Traditional American Thanksgiving dishes lay colorfully decorated on the table in the front part of the room, including a roasted turkey, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes with marshmallows, pumpkin pie, green vegetables, cakes. They were all served by local coordinators. As soon as the members took their seats, one of the oldest coordinators, Caroline appeared in a Native American costume and feathers in her hair, mimicking Native Americans’ war cry. Then, she introduced the origin of Thanksgiving holiday: the arrival of Pilgrims on the east coast of North America and Native Americans’ support and hospitality for the European settlers. She also explained that the Europeans were able to survive the first winter because they learned how to grow corns and crops from Natives. Thanksgiving, according to Caroline, was therefore first celebrated by both European settlers and Native Americans to thank their gods for good harvest. Following Caroline’s introduction, the wife of the University’s Provost, Tiffany, took over the presentation by providing additional information. While Caroline focused more on the historical aspect of the holiday, Tiffany emphasized the apolitical, non-historical and non-religious nature of Thanksgiving. She explained that it is a holiday for family and friends to get together and just enjoy. Furthermore, one does not need to worry about one’s religious background, she continued. The holiday is “for everyone” beyond cultural, ethnic and religious boundaries. After Tiffany’s short presentation, another local coordinator explained how to cook a roasted turkey for Thanksgiving. After about 25 min of the whole presentation each member took some food on her plate, sat down at the table with others, and started eating.

3.1. Methodological considerations

Before we turn to the intricacies of this particular encounter, we first attend to the methodological question of how we investigate temporal dynamics in intercultural interaction. Quite obviously, working with tape-recorded or video-recorded material is part and parcel of interaction studies (intercultural or not). Such recordings give us access to real-time data on the “middle world” timescales within the temporal range of the dialogical system. While the traditions of ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis limit themselves to the *microsocial* timescale by using as a methodological criterion how participants *orient* to what happens in the interaction, newer developments in applied CA (from Drew and Heritage, 1992, onwards) widen the perspective by showing how interaction is part of situated events. The same focus is also found in dialogism (Linell, 2009) and in distributed approaches, e.g. in *Cognitive Event Analysis* (Steffensen, 2013). These traditions also edge towards the social systems timescale, for instance by demonstrating how real-time data play out stabilized interaction patterns that can be described as *genres* or *Communicative Activity Types* (Linell, 2009: 201–210), e.g. doctor–patient interaction. Below these timescales, we find the bodily aspects of real-time interaction (gesturing, facial expressions, etc.). In our model, we have adopted the term ‘pico’ from the distributed approach (cf. Steffensen et al., 2010; Thibault, 2011; Pedersen, 2012; Steffensen, 2013) which refers to interbodily dynamics on a faster timescale than human awareness can grasp. In this study, we build on Uryu’s tape-recordings, for which reason we do not attend to the pico timescale.

³ All names, except for the researcher’s, are pseudonyms.

⁴ Deborah Tannen’s discourse analysis of a Thanksgiving dinner conversation among friends (Tannen, 1984) has inspired a host of subsequent studies on conversational style and its effects on the success or failure of intercultural communication. While the original work examined the discourse of Americans from different ethnic backgrounds and regional settings, the preface of her reedited book in 2005 claims that the book offers a “framework for analyzing cross-cultural communication”. This framework of analysis, Tannen adds, “can then be applied to conversations among speakers of radically different cultural and linguistic backgrounds and in more public context” (Tannen, 2005: xvii–xviii). The present study suggests that intercultural interaction occurs on a much more complex scale than the interactional scale used by Deborah Tannen and that an ecological approach is required to make sense of the data.

These timescales all fall within the temporal range of the dialogical system. But the challenge of studying intercultural interaction arises because the dialogical system is constrained by social and sociocultural systems and dynamics (cf. Steffensen, 2012). We are thus facing the challenge of developing a method for investigating temporal ranges governed by the temporal ranges defined by sense and the phenotype as organizing principles. The same was the situation in Uryu's original study, for which reason she supplemented real-time data collection with a number of additional methods.

First, Uryu conducted a series of playback interviews, following a so-called *stimulated recall* procedure. Stimulated recall is traditionally understood as “an introspection procedure in which (normally) videotaped passages of behavior are replayed to individuals to stimulate recall of their concurrent cognitive activity” (Lyle, 2003: 861). As a method for eliciting data on “wie es eigentlich gewesen” à la *manière de Ranke*, this approach is obviously misguided: the subjects in such a study do not (necessarily) *recall* the taped episode, rather they *reconstruct* a plausible reaction based on what is shown during the interview (cf. Lyle's summary of Tjeerdsma (1997) and Wilcox and Trudel (1998)). However, in this context the strength of the method is that their *reconstruction* is not a purely, decontextualized constructivist enterprise. As it will appear in the analysis below, the reconstruction is a trajectory governed by autobiographical and emotional attractors. The method, thus, does not give us insight into what happened in that particular moment, but it gives us insight into the interpretative inclinations of participants, i.e. how their phenotypical and sense-based temporal ranges mold their behavior and sense-making.⁵

Second, Uryu included retrospective interpretations by the participants in the form of written journals. This method of course shares some of the weaknesses of the stimulated recall procedure, but as with the stimulated recall interviews, it gives us access to a temporal range where the autobiographic and the social resonate.⁶ In a similar vein, Uryu included in her study a written introspective journal which comments on her role as participant observer. She did so, because she, like Deborah Tannen in her 1984 analysis of a Thanksgiving dinner, is both researcher (hereafter: Uryu) and participant (hereafter: Michiko). To achieve methodological validity, the two roles must be kept distinct during analysis, which is facilitated by the introspective journal.

Finally, Uryu also conducted a series of ethnographic interviews, i.e. she had hours-long conversations with the other participants in the conversation, through which she achieved an extensive understanding of history, their world views, etc. As we show later, this method provided Uryu with a deep understanding of the emotional inclinations of the participants. Just like the stimulated recall interviews and the introspective journals give insights into individual life stories, so do such long-term, ethnographic data collection methods give us insights into the temporal range of human sense-making. While comprising the full range of phenotypes and interaction, this temporal range is remarkable in that it illustrates how sense-saturated interactivity endows human beings with a feeling of overall existential coherence. Thus, it shows how our everyday existence flows on a complex backdrop interwoven by culture and emotions which emerge as we collectively and emotionally exploit our sense-making capacities for navigating in what Steffensen (2011) has called an *extended ecology*.

All in all, Uryu's method produces a layered data set that offers us a unique insight into the ecology of intercultural processes. The layered data set can be rendered as in Fig. 3, and will be explored in the following two sections.

3.2. Analysis I: in the mirror of the Other

The participants have been comparing the Thanksgiving tradition with similar (religious) traditions in their respective countries. Following Olga's strong identification with Russian orthodox traditions, the group has been discussing the difference between various strands of Christianity (Russian and Greek orthodox, catholic, protestant) for the benefit of the non-European participants.

We begin our quest for understanding in the inner layer in Fig. 3, i.e. in the actual Thanksgiving conversation as it flows within the temporal range of the dialogical system. As the group moves onto discuss the topic introduced by Olga, Eastern Christianity, Bianka contributes by pointing out that the residence of the current Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople is in Istanbul. Kayo and Michiko overtly react to this information by taking a position as non-European and non-Christian participants, who want to learn about the major European Christian religion. Michiko asks Bianka and Olga why the Patriarch of the Eastern Orthodox Church lives in Turkey, and Olga tries to give some historical background.

[Excerpt 1]

169 Olga: One is, Ottoman Empire had a prosperous time
 170 Bianka: Yes. In old time.
 171 Olga: Yeah. They, you know, took a lot of part of Russia,
 172 [a lot of countries,
 172 Michiko: [Oh:::

⁵ Many will find it confusing that we have placed the autobiographical timescale in the fast end of the continuum, because it relates to the supra-situational lifespan of the individual. However, we focus on the situated memory of previous experiences, and following Järvillehto (2000), memory is not about *recalling* the past, but about *anticipating* the future. Space limits prevent us from elaborating on this view.

⁶ In the follow-up study of journals and interviews, Uryu was able to study closely only German and Japanese nationals but not Russian nationals. Although Olga was initially interested in sharing her thoughts with the researcher, she could not fully participate in the study due to her limited knowledge of written English.

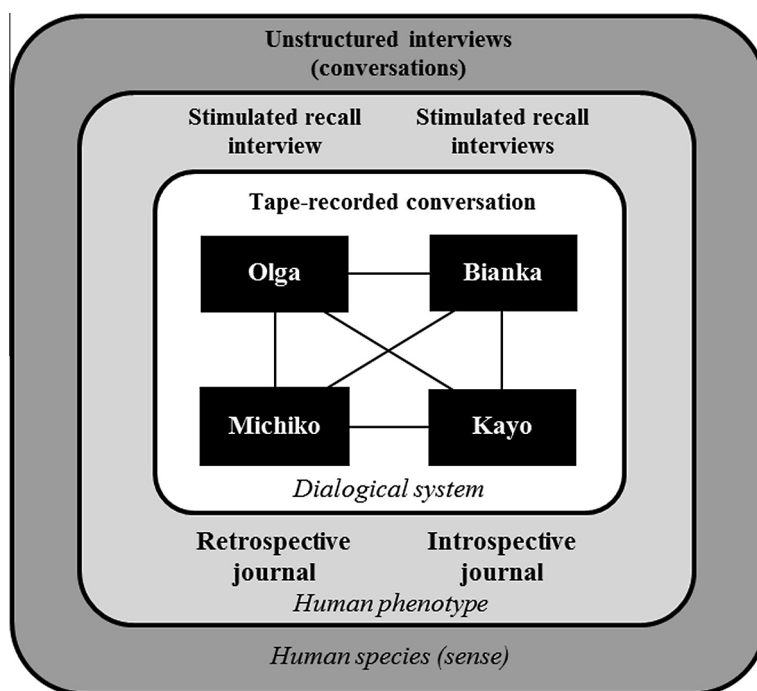


Fig. 3. A layered data set for the ecological investigation of intercultural interaction. Bold font refers to the data methods, italics to temporal ranges.

173 Kayo: So the country went up north
 174 Olga: Yeah, yeah.=
 175 Olga: =Then, Russia, sent them back ((laugh))
 176 Michiko: OK, I see::
 177 Kayo: Huge continent, [connected ((Chuckle))
 178 Olga: [Yeah, yeah.
 179 Michiko: Huh
 180 Olga: So, why, I think it's (...) because of, because Ottoman Empire.

Olga's explanations are not just her rendition of historical facts, but a statement of her identity as a *Russian*. Thus, Uryu's many private conversations with Olga, which functioned as unstructured interviews, provided an insight into the background world view of Olga, i.e. the more stable regularities related to her phenotypical temporal range. Building on notes from these conversations-cum-interviews, the researcher interpreted Olga's comments as follows:

The reason why Olga might feel the need to go into the intricacies of Russian history is 1) because of the marginalization of Eastern Europe by Western Europe caused by the Cold War and its persistent sequels in the minds of Europeans, 2) because of the role America has played in bringing about this marginalization.

Thus, Olga relates to one set of historical facts on a cultural timescale, but her reason for doing so relates to another era in the World history, and prominently an era that has had a much more direct impact on her own life. Theoretically, this relates to the phenotypical temporal range that links a life trajectory in a given constellation of social systems to autobiographical memories. Olga is a child of the Cold War, being born while Khrushchev ruled in the Soviet Union, and leaving her mother country when communism collapsed in 1991. In the light of this information, elicited in another context than the Thanksgiving dinner, the researcher came to the following interpretation of Excerpt 1:

What we see here is not the attempt of individuals to reach out to other individuals by explaining and understanding their respective "cultures" in an effort to "foster intercultural and international understanding," but a reenactment of much larger historical processes: WWII and the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

Performing identities in the present inevitably brings to the fore conventional historical discourses that have currency in particular contexts and not in others. In the dialogical system, Olga is trying to acquaint her Japanese interlocutors with a Russian view of history that is familiar to Eastern Europeans but not necessarily to the rest of the world. Thus, Olga tries to compress the intricacies of the cultural timescale into the timescales within the temporal range of the dialogical system. This interplay between the cultural and the dialogical surfaces as an "emergence of Olga's 'Russian' identity," as Uryu notes.

From Uryu's comments we see how this change “slowly yet irrevocably evoked other members' national identity while affecting their communicative practices in the contingent context.” For example, in her introspective journal, Kayo reflects on the event:

Bianka, Olga、みちこさんが熱心に話しこんでいるのに割り込ませてもらう。この時期の Thanksgiving によく似た各国の休日の話が、いつの間にか宗教の系列の違いの話になる。Olga は Russian だからロシア正教で、それがトルコ付近で発生して北上したのだと教えてくれる。えっ！そうか、あの辺りが最初に文明が発展していたのだ。「Continent だからつながっているのね」と私が言ったら、Bianka が「日本だってロシアと隣り合っているじゃない！」そうでした。その通り。忘れていた訳ではないのに、Korea や China に比べて Russia が隣国という意識が私に低いのは何故だろう。言葉のせいかな姿のせいかな...

Bianka, Olga and Michiko were engaged in an active conversation, and let me join in. At first, they were talking about holidays similar to Thanksgiving in their countries. But at some point the topic shifted to differences between religious sects. Olga is Russian and believes in the Russian Orthodoxy. She explained how it emerged from nearby Turkey and then spread to the north. I thought, wow! That's right. That was the area where ancient civilizations began and developed. I said, “I see, they're connected to each other because it's on the same continent” [cf. line 173 and 177 in Excerpt 1]. But then Bianka chipped in: “But Japan is also a neighbor of Russia, isn't it?” That's true, I thought to myself. Right. But even though I knew at some level that this was true, it made me wonder why I don't feel like Russia is our neighbor as much as Korea or China. Is it because of language? Or maybe physical appearance?

As Olga reconstructs the inter-imperial history of Eastern Europe and the Ottoman Empire, in an attempt to get at grips with her own autobiography, lived out in the tension between present day's global empires, Kayo is prompted to reflect on her Japanese identity. Remarkably, she adopts Olga's categorization of national identity in terms of territoriality: the marked absence of the *feeling* of being neighbors, in spite of the territorial proximity, indicates that she expects neighborhood to be territorially defined. Eschewing spatial arguments, she turns to linguistic and ethnic/physical criteria. However, territory, language (language families), and ethnicity all relate to an evolutionary time-scale, which would indicate that identity, in Kayo's view, is a matter of belonging to a supra-individual group, be it defined as inhabitants of a given territory, speakers of a given language, or bearers of given ethnic traits. In so doing, Kayo relates to the *content* of Olga's narrative, rather than Olga's autobiographic reasons for telling it. Consequently she uses a solidified picture of the Other, in terms of ethnicity and territoriality, to reflect upon her own Japanese identity. Thus, both women recur to simpler temporal ranges in their interpretational efforts to understand the events in the dialogical system.

As for Bianka, she too uses the Ottoman Empire to evoke her own German/European identity. This can be seen in Excerpt 2:

[Excerpt 2]

- 181 Bianka: O, o, Ottoman Empire, very seldom interfered. (1.0)
 182 Michiko: inter-?
 183 Bianka: they did not, ah, convert people.
 184 Michiko: Uh-huh?
 185 Bianka: they say, ‘You live but have to pay taxes’
 186 Michiko: Oh, [OK.
 187 Kayo: [Ah, I see.
 188 Bianka: So, they left them but for taxes.
 189 Michiko: [Uh-huh.
 190 Kayo: [That's wise ((Chuck))
 191 Bianka: [It is. ((Chuck))
 192 Kayo: [Clever. ((Chuck)) (XXXX) but they want money ((Chuck))
 193 Bianka: Yes. ((Chuck))
 194 Olga: So, when they go, (0.5) so far (away), but they had money
 195 Bianka: Even after Jews were expelled from Spain
 196 [the Ottomans welcomed them even though they were Jews
 197 Kayo: [Uh-huh?
 198 Bianka: They went to Turkey.
 199 Michiko: Yeah?
 200 Bianka: So that does Muslims (= that's what Muslims do)
 201 Michiko: Because they can't keep their religion?
 202 Bianka: Yes.
 203 Olga: Uh-huh.

Bianka here reminds the others of a historical fact on a cultural timescale, namely that the Ottoman Empire's longtime prosperity was largely supported by its economic, cultural and religious policies (the so-called *Millet* policy). The Ottomans' generosity towards different ethnic groups and their religions was closely related to its intercultural policies based on eco-

conomic pragmatism. Bianca explains all that in lines 181–188, echoed by Olga in line 194. She then adds in line 195 that the Ottoman Empire accepted Jews “even after they were persecuted and expelled from Spain.”

Why does Bianca feel the need to remind her interlocutors of the Spanish Inquisition that confiscated Jewish properties in the name of the Christian god, and contrast it with Islam’s tolerance towards Jews? Ostensibly, this is cultural information that serves the purpose of “fostering international and intercultural understanding.” But there seems to be another reason why Bianca feels so positive towards the Ottoman Empire. Bianca hints at such autobiographical motives during the stimulated recall interview. Uryu comments:

In the “Playback” session, Bianca explained that her intention behind Line 195 (and her reference to the Ottoman Empire) was a severe criticism of European colonialism practiced from the 16th to the 20th centuries. In the age of colonization, Europeans “(re)discovered” the Americas, Asia, and Africa, and continuously colonized the indigenous non-Christians as “Others” by converting them to Christianity. Unlike the Ottoman Empire, those European colonizers did not attempt to co-exist with the colonized but exploited the “Other” by ruling, displacing and executing indigenous populations. Such negative account of European colonial history inevitably led Bianca to evoke the “Spanish Inquisition.” For her, the “Spanish Inquisition” is an historical evidence to prove European Christians’ intolerance toward “different” religions and cultures due to their sense of superiority to non-European and non-Christian “Others.” On this account, her positive view of the Ottoman Empire is a counterpart of her hidden criticism against Western colonization and what she calls “European racist and colonialist ideology.”

But why does a Westerner like Bianca need to explain to Japanese colleagues the racist and colonialist practices of 15th century Christian Spain at a Thanksgiving dinner in the United States in the early 21st century? What does she gain from it? Uryu comments:

While closely examining Bianca’s retrospective journals and the transcripts of my interviews with her, I began to realize how much WWII and the postwar history have affected Bianca’s (and other German participants’) worldview(s) as well as her (their) communicative practice(s) in the present time. Given that Germany’s tainted nationhood and stigmatized national identity essentially derived from German guilt for “crimes against humanity,” Bianca’s reference to the Ottoman Empire makes sense. Her disguised criticism against the European colonial history apparently aimed to implicitly show her anger and frustration at Western Europeans’ hypocrisy, which allowed them to indict German crimes against humanity but never questioned their own inhuman acts in the past. Such resentment was further intertwined, in her view, with her cultural memories of what she called “bitter” postwar history, e.g. the Allied occupation, “double standard judgment” of the Nuremberg Trials, and Europeans’ relentless accusation of Germans for the war and the Holocaust. These memories, she said, ultimately led her to question the Europeans’ sense of righteousness, justice and innocence in “their” colonial history.

Thus, like in the case of Olga, Bianca’s identity emerges in the interplay between her autobiographical recall of a childhood in the social systems of postwar Europe and the strong dialogical expression of her emotional evaluation of a distant past. Her memories of the repercussions of anti-German sentiment in Europe and the US in the second half of the 20th century has shaped her attitude and identity, and the topic of 16th century Christianity in Europe merely functions as an occasion to reenact these sentiments in the dialogical system, and possibly even to re-experience her own past mirrored in the history of European colonialism.

In sum, this first analysis has shown the fractal structure of how history irrupts in the participants’ communicative practices as their national identities emerge in and through the unfolding interaction. In the excerpts above, both Olga and Bianca were initially referring to the Ottoman Empire’s history in order to share their cultural knowledge about Christianity and its history with other Asian participants. As we have witnessed, however, their talk about Ottoman history unpredictably yet unavoidably functions as a proxy for their own history and identity: Olga talked about the Ottoman Empire in order to imply the historical rivalry between the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire, while Bianca referred to the Ottoman policy towards Jews, and other religious minorities to ultimately criticize Western Europeans’ colonial practices and their hypocrisy vis-à-vis Germans. Kayo expressed admiration, slightly tinged with envy, for the dynamics of historical events on the Eurasian continent, while ignoring similar dynamics in the East Asian region, thus allowing solidified interpretations of the Other to dominate her reflections on her own national identity. The researcher herself, as a participant-observer, was operating on various timescales as she tried to interpret European history both through a Japanese sensibility and with the empathy of the researcher for her research topic. Thus, all four participants experienced how their identities emerged vis-à-vis the others present and constrained by their different versions of history, as well as by broader temporal ranges related to their different sociocultural backgrounds and different life trajectories through various social systems.

While these dynamics all surfaced in the Thanksgiving conversation, it took additional methods to identify the slower, historical timescales that prompted the dialogical system to develop along this particular trajectory. The various meaning potentials of the dialogical event only becomes clear in retrospect through stimulated recall interviews, retrospective journals and unstructured ethnographic interviews. Methodologically, this analytic procedure is naturally vulnerable to the objection that it is a *post hoc* reconstruction of what actually happened in the dialogical system. However, such an objection can be countered by a closer examination of the subsequent trajectory of the dialogical system: here, some of the themes that only appeared through application of indirect methods surface a bit later in the conversation. We show that in analysis II.

3.3. Analysis II: the emerging Self in the Other

In the following excerpt, Bianka mentions that the current Bishop of Rome (the Pope) is visiting Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople in Istanbul (in November 2006). Connecting this cultural information to the previous topic of Eastern Christianity and the Ottoman Empire, Bianka tries to speak of her interest, namely the new Pope, Benedict XVI, who like herself is German.

[Excerpt 3]

205 Bianka: And the Pope is now, I think, although a little, a little difficult
 206 with Turkish government, the Pope is trying to reach the Orthodox
 207 (0.5) Pope in Turkey now in November.
 208 Michiko: [Yeah?
 209 Kayo: [Huh?
 210 Michiko: Really? The Pope is the German Pope,
 211 and he wanna meet the Orthodox Pope?
 212 Bianka: Yes. The Pope of Rome.
 213 Olga: Oh, this is so (). He is, so, German, yeah.
 214 Bianka: Yes, yes, yes, yes ((excited))
 215 Kayo: [((Chuckle)) That's right
 216 Michiko: [((Chuckle)) ye::s, that's right, yes.
 217 Olga: ((Chuckle))
 218 Kayo: That's right. ((laugh))
 219 Bianka: For me, it's always [()
 220 Olga: [Yeah, yeah, yeah ((Chuckle))
 221 Kayo: ((Chuckle))

Uryu comments:

In the excerpt above, I initially play a role of “audience” because of my “non- European” identity and feeling a little alienated from the topic of conversation. As soon as I hear Bianka mentioning the “Pope” in Line 204, however, I intuitively sense that she wants to talk about the new “German” Pope. Finally having found a chance to contribute to the conversation, I add my knowledge to Bianka’s statement while simultaneously showing my sense of rapport to her by building on her previous turn and at the same time informing the others (in case they didn’t know) that the new Pope is German (line 210). My device to show rapport is quickly picked up by Olga in line 213. She too realizes that Bianka’s interest is not about the Pope’s visit in Istanbul, nor his visit to the Patriarch. Rather, Bianka wants other people to notice that the new Pope is a “German”. Bianka’s excited reaction in line 214 evidently proves that my assumption was right.

After the participants at the table have shared Bianka’s joy, Bianka further explains how proud Germans are of the new Pope, referring to a catchy headline in the tabloid *Bild Zeitung*, “*Wir sind Papst* [We are the Pope],” that echoed Kennedy’s famous phrase in front of the Berlin Wall: “*Ich bin ein Berliner* [I am a Berliner].” But suddenly, the conversation takes a bad turn.

[Excerpt 4]

221 Michiko: Isn't that a big thing for German people?
 222 Bianka: Yes.
 223 Michiko: [Yeah?
 224 Bianka: [We have a paper
 225 Michiko: Yeah?
 226 Bianka: Bild means picture newspaper. It's a very cheap tabloid
 227 Michiko: [Uh-huh?
 228 Bianka: [This paper said, ‘We are the Pope’].
 229 Michiko: Ah? Really?
 230 Kayo: ((Chuckle))
 231 Bianka: Yeah.
 232 Michiko: ((Chuckle)) Yeah? But isn't that politically incorrect? ((Chuckle))
 233 Bianka: ((distracted)) Yes... Yes...

When Michiko points out in line 232 that the headline sounds “politically incorrect,” i.e. controversial, Bianka’s previously excited tone and smile immediately disappear. The two other participants look bewildered and concerned. What Michiko had intended as a piece of cultural information, namely that the European Pope had been elected against a Nigerian and a Brazilian candidate, and that therefore the euphoria was perhaps inappropriate, was misinterpreted and taken as a personal rebuff, as if implying: “It is not politically correct to express your joy so overtly.” Uryu notes: “Bianka was so

bewildered that she could not even finish her sentence in line 233.” In retrospect, it is not clear what caused the confusion. It could have been the ambiguous epistemic stance of the utterance “isn’t that politically incorrect?” in line 232. Did Michiko mean: “*I think* the election of a German Pope is controversial” or did she mean “*Some people have said* that this election is controversial”? Was Michiko speaking with her own voice or with the voice of Others? And how does that interpretation depend on Michiko’s own non-European identity?

By raising doubts about the judiciousness of the choice of a European pope over an African or South American pope, Michiko intended to come to the defense of the underdog. In Goffman’s (1981) terms, she was less authoring these words, than animating an anti-colonial discourse which she identified with. Her commentary in her introspective journal is revealing:

I was aware of the racially sensitive aspect of the conclave, especially for those non-Europeans. Although the conclave in 2005 drew people’s attention all over the world due to its possibility of electing the first non-European Pope, it ultimately chose a European for the supreme spiritual leader as expected. While I understood Germans’ excitement for the result, I also felt that they should have been more considerate for those non-European Christians, who never played any crucial roles in the politics of the Roman Catholic Church even though they are also Christians. Retrospectively, in short, my ambivalent remark about the headline primarily derived from my non-European “Other’s” viewpoint of the conclave.

But the problems have just started. Michiko’s comment has introduced a topic that is extremely sensitive, and not the least what Bianka had planned to converse about. The conversation continues:

[Excerpt 5]

234 Bianka: But when he became the Pope, there was a problem..
 235 Bianka: because ... he was ... ah=
 236 Michiko: =He was, uh, Nazi?
 237 Bianka: ((distracted)) [Nazi ...
 238 Kayo: [Oh, really?
 239 Michiko: Yeah. But you know, that was, uh, they had to.
 240 Kayo: [()
 241 Bianka: [But at that time, everybody had to
 242 Bianka: ((to Kayo)) Sorry. [I was interrupting
 243 Michiko: [I know, I know

Because of Bianka’s hesitation in line 235, Michiko took the following turn and tried to complete her sentence in the direction she thought Bianka had intended, by stating what was, after all, common knowledge, namely that the Pope served in the Hitler Youth when he was 14.⁷ She was less displaying her knowledge about the Pope than performing a display of knowledge to show that she too, like Olga and Bianka, was in the know regarding European history – in a sense engaging the Europeans on their turf. However, Michiko’s eagerness to interpret Bianka’s ambiguous utterance in line 234–235 and to offer an interpretation of her hesitation in line 236 was not perceived as a sign of solidarity but as an indictment. By reminding the participants that the Pope had been accused of “being a Nazi,” Michiko had apparently used the ultimate insult in American English. The invisible scare quotes surrounding the term “Nazi” and the fact that she seemed to author these words, not just animate them, backfired. Bianka was offended and the taboo term “Nazi” remained uncontested, hanging like a cloud over the subsequent conversation.

On the timescale of the social system, the term “Nazi” turns out to be a general stigmatization of Germans in the American imagination. As a condensation symbol, it carries enormous emotional value that transforms the historical acronym of the German National Socialist Workers Party (the NSDAP) into an ahistorical, mythical signifier of timeless significance (Barthes, 1957). The offensive nature of the word Nazi is not due to its intrinsic dictionary definition as a member of the National Socialist party. It had the “disorienting effect” (Butler, 1997) of an insult precisely because it evoked a different context that has been stigmatized and demonized since 1945. Thus, the symbol creates a self-similar fractal between the long cultural timescale of accumulated sense and the shorter interactional timescale. On the former, six decades of post-war trauma and cultural accusation and guilt has accumulated into a high-energetic symbol, and on the latter the full energy of this symbol is released in a short moment, exploding in strong emotional and cultural cascades in the entire dialogical system.

It is difficult to interpret the multiple layers of Bianka’s sudden distress in line 237. Was it genuine? Was it exaggerated? Did she not know about the well-advertised controversy surrounding Cardinal Josef Ratzinger? Did she not know that he was 14 in 1941, that membership in the Hitler Youth was mandatory, and that it did not necessarily mean that he espoused Nazi ideology? Bianka’s highly dramatic, almost theatrical, reaction can lead one to wonder if Bianka was *enacting* rather than *expressing* a German identity position for the benefit of the Japanese researcher? The discourse of Nazism is so stigmatized in the US that it has ceased to be the name of a political party in the 30’s and 40’s in Germany – it has become the very

⁷ The debate about the participation of ordinary Germans in the Holocaust was rekindled by Daniel Goldhagen’s 1996 book, and later on by a steady stream of articles in the *New York Times* on the Holocaust (e.g., recently Haughney, 2009) and by the visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Israel in May 2009 (see Donadio, 2009a, 2009b; Donadio and Cowell, 2009).

incarnation of evil. Through her shocked repetition of the word “Nazi” in line 237, Bianka was teaching her dinner companions something about the stigmatization of Germans in American discourse by enacting an American English taboo for the benefit of Japanese interlocutors in America.

In the Playback session, Bianka remembered this scene very well. Excerpt 6 is taken from the stimulated recall interview that Uryu conducted.

[Excerpt 6]

- Uryu: In fact the Pope was not a Nazi.
So why didn't you correct me back then? (2.0)
- Bianka: because I- because I- (1.0) because I guess I felt helpless
- Uryu: helpless?
- Bianka: Yes (.) yes (1.0) yes I was very shocked when you said that.
You know I was almost (.) almost how can I say? (0.5)
I was almost paralyzed (.) paralyzed.
[...]
Yes he was German but he was also just a little boy
and you called him Nazi
- Uryu: ah... (0.5) I see
- Bianka: (emotional) I thought you understand the situation. Not like Americans.
All of a sudden you call him Nazi like Americans.
So I was so shocked [...] Nazi is like a weapon to hurt you.
Nazi is not just a word (.) it's like a weapon to kill Germans
- Uryu: but you went along with the word after that
- Bianka: yes yes because (1.0) I was thinking if this (0.5)
nice and knowledgeable researcher still call him Nazi what can I do?
I was really shocked because (0.5) you also acted like Americans.
- Uryu: Americans? Like- random Americans?
- Bianka: It's more like (0.5) American media. They just want to believe
we are chosen by the devil and we are all bad people.
Listen to what the media say about us. They make it look like
all the Germans were fanatic supporters of Hitler during the war.
That's not true. And then (0.5) you acted like Americans.
That's why I was so shocked.

From her perspective, Uryu comments in her introspective journal:

In contrast to Bianka's expectation and presumption of me as a “knowledgeable” researcher, however, I actually did not know much about how the Pope was involved with the Nazi party during the war. I had briefly read newspapers before, which said that the Pope had a “Nazi past.” Neither did I know that membership in the Hitler Youth was legally obligatory for all German youths during war time. Nor was I aware of the extremely negative connotations of the term especially in the U.S. since I am not American, nor a native speaker of English. When I naïvely used the word “Nazi” in line 236 [excerpt 5], in retrospect, I had not thought much about my choice of the word nor did I have any intention of insulting her. I was simply careless and insensitive about the English term I was using. Unfortunately, my insensitive word choice and ignorance about the history of the Nazi regime caused an extremely infelicitous effect in this interaction. Bianka later expressed her bitter feeling by describing this incident as if to say, “You insulted me without knowing it.

From Bianka's and Uryu's statements, it is clear that intercultural interaction is channeled by pre-existing discourses that are very much out of our control. The feeling of disorientation and helplessness that Bianka describes upon being interpellated by the word *Nazi*, even though it was applied to the Pope and not to her, makes palpable the incommensurable gap between interlocutors from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds due to the condensed historicity of words. Whether this gap was perceived as such at the time or whether it was reconstructed a posteriori for the benefit of the non-European and non-American researcher, is open to question. One thing is certain: the use of a common language, here English, is no guarantee that the speakers' words have the same value nor that the contexts evoked by these words are the same. As [Judith Butler \(1997\)](#) argues, speakers are responsible for the words they use but they are not necessarily the authors of these words:

If the one who delivers [injurious speech] does not author it, and the one who is marked by it is not described by it, then the workings of interpellative power exceed the subjects constituted by its terms, and the subjects so constituted exceed the interpellation by which they are animated [...] The subject who speaks hate speech is clearly responsible for such speech, but that subject is rarely the originator of such speech. [Such] speech works through the invocation of convention; it circulates, and though it requires the subject for its speaking, it neither begins nor ends with the subject who speaks or with the specific name that is used.

(Butler, 1997: 34)

In excerpt 5 line 239, Michiko picks up on Bianka's attempts to rehistoricize the blanket term Nazi by reminding her interlocutors that every 14 year-old in 1941 had to serve in the Hitler Youth. Uryu adds in her introspective journal:

It is quite odd that I was almost speaking on behalf of Germans to defend those ordinary Germans during wartime, although I am not even German. I also use modal auxiliaries (“had to”) to emphasize that any German nationals were, whether they liked it or not, “irresistibly forced” to contribute to the war, although I did not even live in Germany during WWII. How would I know that? In retrospect, it was my “Japanese” identity that enabled me to speak as if I knew something about the wartime situation in Germany. When I was speaking on behalf of Germans, my “Japanese” identity slowly emerged, and led me to subconsciously defend ordinary German people. After all, we too had once been under totalitarian control supported by excessive nationalism. [...] Simultaneously, I also felt unsettled to witness some Europeans' unforgiving attitudes toward Germans after 60 years. More specifically, the news made me realize how difficult it is for Germans to overcome their stigmatized past. Such vague anxiety later became a conviction when I read an article about Günter Grass's confession about his past as a member of Waffen-SS and Europeans' negative reactions to it (in August, 2006). Although he was known as a prominent political activist who has criticized the Nazi regime for several decades, some Europeans still severely accused him without mercy. It seems that Günter Grass's past efforts of being morally right does not mean anything as long as he was once involved with the Nazis. When I heard these two incidents, in short, I bitterly realized that those Germans will never be liberated from their stigmatized past.

Analysis II has explored how two parties miscommunicated with and misunderstood each other due to different voices that spoke through them: the term ‘Nazi’ spoken in English by a Japanese in America had lost its German political meaning of “member of the German NSDAP” and had become a condensed symbol that carried the American mythical and totally stigmatized meaning of ‘quintessentially evil’. Both the German and the Japanese interlocutors were trapped in the “linguistic vulnerability” that the word evoked. As Butler argued, language itself had acquired an ‘agency’ against which speakers felt “helpless” or felt they had to perform a certain expected helplessness. The Japanese interlocutor felt guilty of having insulted the German without really wanting it, and the German felt guilty for her nation's past. But according to Butler, the “political promise of the performative” lies precisely in its ability to recognize the time lag between the illocutionary act and its perlocutionary effects. Part of the quest for “linguistic survival” is to become conscious of the weight of the past, the ‘condensed historicity’ of words and to recontextualize language in ways that exorcise the myth by “opening up the domain of the sayable” (Butler, 1997: 133).

Uryu does just that when she transcends the methodological constraints of the stimulated recall interview and honestly confronts the perlocutionary effect of the words she used and explores the historical “conditions of possibility” of their use. Paradoxically, it is precisely the recognition by Michiko and Bianka of their respective linguistic vulnerabilities that opened up for them the possibility to break from the current context and its dominant Thanksgiving ideology. It became suddenly clear that the meaning of Bianka's utterances about the Ottoman Empire might be found, not in the information it gave about past history, but as the performance of a present German identity in search of linguistic and cultural survival in the face of the overwhelming spread of English and its attendant ideologies.

Should the participants have kept within the limits of acceptable speech? Should they have avoided any political discussion at this Thanksgiving dinner? But how could they have, then, reached “intercultural and international understanding”? The “elephant in the room” was, of course, the absent voice of the Americans. Their language was spoken, their food was eaten, and the memory of America's founding story was recalled, but they themselves were not part of this exchange. The Americans remained the absent unmarked Other. Indeed, it would have been unrealistic to expect Americans at a Thanksgiving dinner for foreign visitors to allow themselves to become “marked.” Not surprisingly, the rest of the exchange turned to these invisible hosts and the role *they* had played vis-à-vis Germans, Russians and Japanese during and after the war. It is with a sense of bitterness that Bianka exclaimed at the end of the meeting:

389 Bianka: If you think about it- it's funny they celebrate Thanksgiving.
 390 What happened to those Indians? (0.2) They killed them.
 391 What is ‘Thanksgiving’ then?

But the paradox of history is that it is precisely the Americans that enabled this intercultural interaction to take place. The friendship that developed subsequently between the four participants was due in large part to a space that Americans had provided to “learn about other nations and cultures.” However, it was not the Americans, but the foreign participants who opened up that space themselves with courage and personal conviction. Indeed, the organization, born of the Cold War and its fear of political dissent both in the US and in the Soviet Union, has in the last four years become more open to political debate. That too acquires its meaning only in retrospect.

4. The ecology and multi-scalarity of identity

A recurrent theme in our investigation of the intercultural interaction above has been the dynamics of identity. The topic of language, discourse and identity has been one of most widely treated in newer applied linguistics (cf. e.g. Bucholtz and Hall, 2005; De Fina et al., 2006). This body of work has taught us that personal identity is not determined by an essential

core in the single individual, but rather negotiated in the course of the dialog: identity is an interactional phenomenon, not a discourse-external one. This is also at the core of an ecological understanding of identity:

Instead of seeing one's multiple social identities as given by one's position in the social world, an ecological paradigm would see them as so many subject positions emerging in the interplay between the social world and the discursive situation at hand.

(Kramsch and Steffensen, 2008: 26)

However, an ecological approach takes the non-essentialist approach one step further than the various constructivist schools, as it considers the constructivist approach to be equally reductionist, because it restricts its scope to one particular timescale, i.e. that of the unfolding interaction. As should be abundantly clear from our analyses, this is far too simplified if we are to understand the intricacies of intercultural interaction, and for that reason the ecological approach to timescales implies a *post-constructivist* view on identity. In this line of thinking, we follow Jay Lemke (2002: 72) when he asks:

What else is an *identity* but the performance, verbally and nonverbally, of a possible constellation of attitudes, beliefs, and values that has a recognizable coherence by the criteria of some community? Of course identity is complex; we define it on many timescales of behavioral coherence.

It is exactly because we can enact coherent behavior on many timescales that we cannot promote one timescale as the identity determining one. This insight contrasts with as well essentialist as constructivist approaches to identity. In treating identity as, for instance, a matter of being Japanese, Russian or German, the former has singled out a cultural timescale as the determining one, while the latter has singled out the microsocial timescale by claiming that identity is solely interactionally constructed.

In an ecological approach, interaction is not merely unfolding on a microsocial timescale, and it does not constitute a situation that can be isolated from trans-situational characteristics. Accordingly, the participants do not find themselves 'in' a self-contained situation where the members "on the inside" autonomously co-construct their identities. Rather, the interaction is an open system, where the participants depend on the dialogical system's environment. The environment does not *determine* the identity of the participants, but it offers specific affordances that make certain identities more available than others. The implication of this view is that identity is neither *stable* nor *constructed*, but *emergent*, and the emergence of identity is determined by identity attractors on many timescales. These identity attractors surely include local, interactional dynamics that emerge in the interaction, and therefore our dialogical identity emerges as we coordinate various, sometimes conflicting, considerations within ourselves and between ourselves and our co-participants in the dialogical system. Thus, an ecological view on identity shares an important feature with constructivist approaches, as both traditions acknowledge the relationality of self and other: each of the participants in the Thanksgiving dinner was defining their identity relative to others. But as this relationality is multiscalar, the participants developed proxy identities, the Japanese vis-à-vis the German, the German vis-à-vis the Russian, and the Russian vis-à-vis the Japanese. In addition, all lived in the shadow of the absent Other (Linell, 2009; Bang and Døør, 2007), namely the American discourse of Thanksgiving that they were supposed to "learn about." This absent Other constrained the dialogical system and the timescales within its temporal range, which made the participants utter words that were not necessarily theirs. Michiko recycled words she had read in the newspapers, Olga ventriloquated the discourse of Russian history books, and Bianka repeated what she had learned about the generosity of the Ottoman Empire.

In a sense, these data are a vivid illustration of Bakhtin's statement that "Language is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others. Expropriating, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process" (Bakhtin, 1981: 294). As identity is voiced in the intercultural interaction, voices of the past and voices of the absent mesh with the voices of the participants, and it thus becomes a methodological prerequisite to identify these interwoven voices by asking: "Who is speaking, to whom, and when/where?" (cf. Kramsch, 2003).

5. The role of the researcher and methodological considerations

Another important lesson to be learnt from this study pivots on the role of the researcher in understanding the dynamics of identity. The dialogical system is a highly sensitive system, and disturbing this very sensitivity offers a method for understanding the multiscalar and self-organizing dynamics of identity. In fact, Uryu's original method is based on how her subject position not only impacted upon her data collection but also affected her data analysis as well. In discussing this issue from epistemological, phenomenological, and methodological perspectives, we first need to re-think the relationship between the research subject and the researcher from the ecological perspectives.

In "the complex theory," Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008) addressed that not only the relationship between the researcher and the researched, but also the research itself, need to be re-conceptualized with regard to the notion of "objectivity." As we observed above, Uryu's role as an active listener, observer and participant of the research site and its impacts upon the research data collection and analysis necessarily put such a discrete notion of objectivity vs. subjectivity into question. Instead, it echoes Larsen-Freeman and Cameron's claim that "no matter how a researcher tries, total objectivity – a view of matters apart from who he or she is – can never be achieved" (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron, 2008: 243).

Such an uncertain view in measuring the research object is not so uncommon even in a field of hard science. In Physics, "the Heisenberg uncertainty principle" claims that even a small element of the ecological system, such as a particle, cannot

be measured with an absolute sense of objectivity because the act of observation changes the particle itself. Regarding the study above, the research participants' subject positions are significantly affected by the researcher's subjectivities as their historicities begin to interact, and vice versa. Because the researcher and the researched historically co-construct their subject positions in the interactional communicative context, there is no total objectivity but only the "relationality" of subjectivity and objectivity in the research data. In better understanding what identity a research subject performs in the contingent context, it is therefore crucial for the researcher to put him/herself on the line and factor in his/her own subject position in the research context.

To begin with this issue from the epistemological point of view, it should be noted that Uryu's choice of research site among many other potential intercultural sites significantly reflects her subject position within particular social, cultural, historical and ideological contexts. As a Japanese academic researcher interested in intercultural interaction, Uryu naturally chose her research site for the possibilities it offered her as a Japanese visitor to study an international university community in the U.S. Needless to say, familiarity and even comfortableness with the participants in her study were secondary to her (postwar) Japanese national identity to explain her motivation to choose this particular site. Indeed, on a slower timescale the idea of such gatherings grew originally in a Cold War context as a place where local Americans could host foreign visitors from former enemy countries through cultural exchange programs. On this account, Uryu's seemingly natural choice of the research site was, in fact, "constrained by the general patterns of inequality" (Blommaert, 2005) of the contemporary world due to her own subjective experiences.

Similarly, Uryu's contrastive study of German and Japanese participants reflects her subject position as well. Because of the historical and ideological background of the research institution, most of the participants at these gatherings were German and Japanese nationals, i.e., former enemies whose nations were not only vanquished in WWII but experienced a loss of national identity and a neo-colonial relationship with the U.S. after the war. Accordingly, it was easy for her to choose Germans as a mirror to understand her primary interest in the subject, namely, the way Japanese participants view American people, their culture and society. Thus, Uryu's eagerness to study German subjects was related to her interest in the Germans' view of both WWII history and the postwar compensations they have had to pay for the Holocaust.

Now, we would like to discuss how the researcher's subjectivities impact upon the research data from a phenomenological viewpoint. Regarding the impact of the researcher's identity upon the data itself, as we observed above, Uryu's Japanese identity came into play in her interaction with Bianca and others at the Thanksgiving dinner. For example, as soon as Michiko realized Bianca's overreaction to her calling the pope a "Nazi," she immediately shifted her position from a non-European interlocutor to a former Axis national in order to further defend ordinary Germans from Goldhagen's interpellation of them as "Hitler's willing executioners" (Goldhagen, 1996). Michiko did so because she projected her image of "Self" as an ordinary Japanese in wartime onto that of ordinary Germans, based on her cultural memory of WWII accounts and the postwar history of Germany and Japan. In other words, taking the position of an "imagined" wartime Japanese national, Michiko was speaking to Bianca from a particular historical position that projected the past onto the present. In this way, the interactional faux-pas on a microsocial timescale triggered a chain-reaction in the way the imagined national identities emerged in the participants' performed interaction. This phenomenon eventually allowed them to co-construct an interactional ground in which they re-historicized WWII and the postwar events by (re)living the history as an imagined event in the present time.

The case exemplifies that the participation of the researcher inevitably impacts upon the data itself regardless of whether he/she wants it or not. Such epistemological and phenomenological implications of the researcher's role in intercultural interaction research further raise some methodological considerations. Firstly, the study shows the benefits of triangulating the relationship between Japan and the U.S. with a third participant from Germany or Russia. More specifically, Uryu could better understand Bianca's resentment of the American view of the Holocaust and WWII only after she saw how Olga vigorously supported Bianca's opinion. Similarly, Michiko's ambiguous frustration about the victors' double standard of justice and perceived racist policies was fully revealed only after Bianca and Olga strongly protested the American narrative of justice performed at the Nuremberg trials.

Secondly, intercultural interaction research can benefit from the inclusion of a third participant and/or a third perspective (cf. Linell, 2009) in the studied context as it allows the researcher to objectify herself and her relation to the others as well. Reflexive analysis of the researcher's double identity (as participant and as researcher) can be seen as a 'third place' (Kramsch, 1993) that enables her to discern in what "borderline zone of existing hegemonies" (Blommaert, 2005: 106) her own agency is located. This reflexive moment in the analysis goes beyond the constraints of traditional intercultural interaction research. By including not only actual national identities and historical events on each their timescales, but also by looking for proxy identities and empathized and projected events, the researcher is able to detect how participants develop new meanings that bring about social change by living and re-living the imagined spaces of a subjectively experienced history.

The ecological approach abandons both the linear model of time and the neatness of the tiered timescales model. Instead, it turns to the fluid, chaotic sea of interpenetrating lives, narratives and memories where language does not refer to social and historical reality in a linear way. The cultural inertia of language "evokes" different worlds which it "invites" participants to enter, not as a Heideggerian "house of being," but rather as a non-linear *sea* of being, where, as Toni Morrison (1993) said in her Nobel Lecture in 1993, "language arcs toward the place where meaning may lie." The temporal dynamics of language allows us to engage with cultural domains that are taboo, unspeakable, unsayable. They need to be rehistoricized, put into

the multivoiced context of intercultural communication. In such a context, the meaning of events becomes apparent only in retrospect, in heterogeneous time.

6. Conclusion

If we remain on the level of linguistic structures and the pragmatics of appropriate speech, it is easy to think that the exchange above was a particularly dramatic example of intercultural miscommunication or even totally inappropriate communication. One could argue that silence or acceptance of the dominant discourse is the price to pay for intercultural harmony. And there are many people who would say that the only way to survive in a multicultural society is to perform the rituals of everyday life, like Thanksgiving dinners, without addressing divisive topics like politics or religion. However, intercultural encounters such as the one discussed here always contain seeds of opposition. Precisely because the participants come from different discourse traditions, they define differently the “domain of the sayable” (Butler, 1997).

If intercultural interaction attempts to open up the domain of the sayable across different discourse traditions, it also opens up speaking subjects to unpredictable selves. Throughout this exchange, what was opened up were not only different ways of talking about past events, but different ways of understanding oneself as a speaking subject in a particular time and place. The seemingly simple purpose of this Thanksgiving dinner to “learn about America and our traditions” and “learn about other nations and cultures” created unforeseen opportunities to define oneself in relation to others and to make visible the invisible discourses through which our identities emerge.

The analysis of the Thanksgiving dinner we have discussed in this paper was not meant to highlight intercultural (in)competences but to do away with the notion of competence as a normative, individual ability that one can exercise through politeness, tact and acceptance of the conventionally expected boundaries of speech. If we recognize that, as Butler says, “the historicity of language exceeds in all directions the history of the speaking subject.” (1997: 28) then we need to see intercultural understanding not just as a process of negotiation of intended meanings, but as joint sense-making that emerges beyond the control of any one individual. It is through the emergence of such non-intended meanings that we can break with context and reassert the life of language. As Judith Butler notes, “The time of discourse is not the time of the subject, but it *makes possible* the speaking time of the subject.” (1997: 28). “[Speech is] not only defined by social context, [it] is also marked by its capacity to break with context” (Butler, 1997: 40).

Intercultural understanding at this Thanksgiving dinner did not come from exchanging turkey and cranberry sauce recipes, even though sharing food provided a safe context. It came from the inordinately more risky step of engaging with each others’ historical discourses and from the humility necessary to acknowledge one’s discursive vulnerability. With Butler we would argue that this is the condition of our linguistic survival and, we could say, the survival of intercultural interaction itself.

References

- Bakhtin, M., 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination*. In: Holquist, M., Emerson C. (Eds.), University of Texas Press, Austin.
- Bang, J.C., Døør, J., 2007. *Language, Ecology and Society – A Dialectical Approach*. In: Steffensen S.V., Nash, J. Continuum, London.
- Barthes, R., 1957. *Mythologies*. Seuil, Paris.
- Blommaert, Jan, 2005. *Discourse*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bråten, S., 2009. *The Intersubjective Mirror in Infant Learning and Evolution of Speech*. John Benjamins, Amsterdam.
- Bucholtz, M., Hall, K., 2005. Identity and Interaction: A Sociocultural Linguistic Approach. *Discourse Studies* 7 (4–5), 584–614.
- Butler, J., 1997. *Excitable Speech. The Politics of the Performative*. Routledge, London.
- Byram, M., 1997. *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*. Multilingual Matters, Clevedon.
- Cowley, S.J., 1998. Of timing, turn-taking, and conversation. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research* 27 (5), 541–571.
- Cowley, S.J. (Ed.), 2007. *The cognitive dynamics of distributed language*. *Language Sciences* 29 (5) (special issue).
- Cowley, S.J. (Ed.), 2009. *Distributed language*. *Pragmatics & Cognition* 17 (3) (special issue).
- Cowley, S.J. (Ed.), 2011a. *Distributed Language*. John Benjamins, Amsterdam.
- Cowley, S.J., 2011b. Taking a language stance. *Ecological Psychology* 23 (3), 185–209.
- Cowley, S.J., Major, J.C., Steffensen, S.V., Dinis, A. (Eds.), 2010. *Signifying Bodies: Biosemiosis, Interaction and Health*. Catholic University of Portugal, Braga.
- De Fina, A., Schiffrin, D., Bamberg, M. (Eds.), 2006. *Discourse and Identity*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Delignières, D., Fortes, M., Ninot, G., 2004. The fractal dynamics of self-esteem and physical self. *Nonlinear Dynamics in Psychology and Life Sciences* 8, 479–510.
- Donadio, R., Cowell, A., 2009. Leaving Mideast, Pope offers stronger Holocaust message. *New York Times* (May 16), A5.
- Donadio, R., 2009a. On his tour, Pope runs into politics of Middle East and Holocaust. *New York Times* (May 12), A12.
- Donadio, R., 2009b. Pope’s wartime activities resurface on Israeli trip. *New York Times* (May 13), A6.
- Drew, P., Heritage, J. (Eds.), 1992. *Talk at Work: Interaction in Institutional Settings*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Edmondson, W., House, J., 1998. Interkulturelles Lernen: ein überflüssiger Begriff. *Zeitschrift für Fremdsprachenforschung* 9 (2), 161–188.
- Fill, A., Mühlhäuser, P., 2001. *The Ecological Linguistics Reader. Language, Ecology and Environment*. Continuum, London.
- Fowler, C.A., Richardson, M.J., Marsh, K.L., Shockley, K.D., 2008. Language use, coordination, and the emergence of cooperative action. In: Fuchs, A., Jirsa, V.K. (Eds.), *Coordination: Neural, Behavioral and Social Dynamics*. Springer-Verlag, Berlin, pp. 261–279.
- Goffman, E., 1981. *Forms of Talk*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.
- Goldhagen, D., 1996. *Hitler’s Willing Executioners. Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*. Alfred Knopf, New York.
- Harris, R., 1998. *Introduction to Integrational Linguistics*. Pergamon Press, Oxford.
- Haughney, C., 2009. A history of infamy, sold off in pieces. *New York Times* (May 15), A21.
- Hodges, B.H., Fowler, C.A. (Eds.), 2010. Distributed, dynamical, and dialogical: new coordinations for language. *Ecological Psychology* 22 (4) (special issue).
- Hodges, B.H., Fowler, C.A. (Eds.), 2011. Distributed, ecological, and dynamical approaches to languaging and language. *Ecological Psychology* 23 (3) (special issue).

- Hodges, B.H., Steffensen, S.V., Martin, J.E. (Eds.), 2012. Caring, conversing, and realizing values: new directions in language studies. *Language Sciences* 34 (5), 499–506.
- Hu, A., Byram, M. (Eds.), 2009. *Intercultural Competence and Foreign Language Learning*. Gunter Narr, Tübingen.
- Järvillehto, T., 2000. The theory of the organism–environment system: IV. The problem on mental activity and consciousness. *Integrative Physiological and Behavioral Science* 35 (2), 35–57.
- Kramsch, C., 1993. *Context and Culture in Language Teaching*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Kramsch, C. (Ed.), 2002. *Language Acquisition and Language Socialization. Ecological Perspectives*. Continuum, London.
- Kramsch, C., 2003. Identity, role and voice in cross-cultural (mis)communication. In: House, J., Kasper, G., Ross, S. (Eds.), *Misunderstanding in Social Life*. Longman, London, pp. 129–153.
- Kramsch, C., 2007. Ecological perspectives on foreign language education. *Language Teaching* 41 (3), 389–408.
- Kramsch, C., Steffensen, S.V., 2008. Ecological perspectives on second language acquisition and socialization. In: Hornberger, N., Duff, P. (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Language and Education. Language and Socialization*, vol. 8. Springer Verlag, Heidelberg.
- Kramsch, C., Whiteside, A., 2008. Language ecology in multilingual settings. Towards a theory of symbolic competence. *Applied Linguistics* 29 (4), 645–671.
- Larsen-Freeman, D., 2002. Language acquisition and language use from a chaos/complexity theory perspective. In: Kramsch, C. (Ed.), *Language Acquisition and Language Socialization. Ecological Perspectives*. Continuum, London.
- Larsen-Freeman, D., Cameron, D., 2008. *Complexity Theory and Second Language Learning*. Oxford U Press, Oxford.
- Lemke, J., 2000. Across the scales of time: artifacts, activities, and meanings in ecosocial systems. *Mind, Culture, and Activity* 7 (4), 273–290.
- Lemke, J., 2002. Language development and identity: multiple timescales in the social ecology of learning. In: Kramsch, C. (Ed.), *Language Acquisition and Language Socialization. Ecological Perspectives*. Continuum, London.
- Liddicoat, A.J., 2011. *An Introduction to Conversation Analysis*. Continuum, London.
- Linell, P., 2009. *Rethinking Language, Mind, and World Dialogically: Interactional and Contextual Theories of Human Sense-making*. Information Age Publishing, Charlotte, NC.
- Love, N., 1990. The locus of language in a redefined linguistics. In: Davis, H.G., Taylor, T.J. (Eds.), *Redefining Linguistics*. Routledge, London.
- Love, N., 2004. Cognition and the language myth. *Language Sciences* 26, 525–544.
- Lyle, J., 2003. Stimulated recall: a report on its use in naturalistic research. *British Educational Research Journal* 29 (6), 861–878.
- Morin, E., 1987. *Penser l'Europe*. Gallimard, Paris.
- Morrison, T., 1993. *Nobel Lecture in Literature*. Knopf, New York.
- Pedersen, S.B., 2012. Interactivity in health care: bodies, values and dynamics. *Language Sciences* 34 (5), 532–542 (Special issue on *Caring and conversing: the distributed dynamics of dialogue*, ed. by B. Hodges, S.V. Steffensen and J. Martin).
- Salthe, S., 1991. Two forms of hierarchy theory in Western discourses. *International Journal of General Systems* 18, 251–264.
- Steffensen, S.V., 2009. Language, languaging and the extended mind hypothesis. *Pragmatics & Cognition* 17 (3), 677–697.
- Steffensen, S.V., 2011. Beyond mind: an extended ecology of languaging. In: Cowley, S.J. (Ed.), *Distributed Language*. John Benjamins, Amsterdam.
- Steffensen, S.V., 2012. Care and conversing in dialogical systems. *Language Sciences* 34 (5), 513–531 (Special issue on *Caring and conversing: the distributed dynamics of dialogue*, ed. by B. Hodges, S.V. Steffensen and J. Martin).
- Steffensen, S.V., 2013. Human interactivity: problem-solving, solution-probing, and verbal patterns in the wild. In: Cowley, S.J., Vallée-Tourangeau, F. (Eds.), *Cognition Beyond the Brain: Interactivity and Human Thinking*. Springer, Dordrecht.
- Steffensen, S.V., Fill, A., 2013. Ecolinguistics: the state of the art and future horizons. *Language Sciences*, 41 (PA), 6–25.
- Steffensen, S.V., Thibault, P.J., Cowley, S.J., 2010. Living in the social meshwork: the case of health interaction. In: Cowley, S.J., Major, J.C., Steffensen, S.V., Dinis, A. (Eds.), *Signifying Bodies: Biosemiosis, Interaction and Health*. Catholic University of Portugal, Braga.
- Tannen, D., 1984. *Conversational Style*. Ablex, Mahwah, NJ.
- Tannen, D., 2005. *Conversational Style*, second ed. Ablex, Mahwah, NJ.
- Thibault, P.J., 2011. First order languaging dynamics and second-order language: the distributed language view. *Ecological Psychology* 23 (3), 210–245.
- Tjeerdsma, B.L., 1997. A comparison of teacher and student perspectives of tasks and feedback. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education* 16, 388–400.
- Trevarthen, C., 1998. The concept and foundations of intersubjectivity. In: Bråten, S. (Ed.), *Intersubjective Communication and Emotion in Early Ontogeny*. CUP, Cambridge, pp. 15–46.
- Uryu, M., 2009. *Another thanksgiving dinner. Language, identity and history in the age of globalization* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation). University of California at Berkeley.
- Van Orden, G.C., Holden, J.G., 2002. Intentional contents and self-control. *Ecological Psychology* 14, 87–109.
- Van Orden, G.C., Holden, J.G., Turvey, M.T., 2003. Self-organization of cognitive performance. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 132 (3), 331–350.
- Wilcox, S., Trudel, P., 1998. Constructing the coaching principles and beliefs of a youth ice hockey coach. *AVANTE* 4 (3), 39–66.