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Communication and Social Interaction across Cultures: The Case of a German and Ghanaian Educational Exchange Program

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Abstract: Using a constructivist epistemology, this paper explores the cross-cultural learning experiences of exchange students from Hochschule Düsseldorf University of Applied Sciences in Germany and the University for Development Studies in Ghana. The findings reveal differences in the students’ commitment to agreements, tasks and time; while the German students have a high commitment to time awareness -- reporting to lectures and other meetings on time -- their Ghanaian counterparts do not. We suggest that universities preparing students for educational exchange programs should actively embark on cross-cultural education and training, providing adequate information on the context and culture of the host country, targeting all stakeholders before, during and after the exchange program. This will enhance effective intercultural relations and social interaction, and minimize culture shock.

Keywords: intercultural communication, international education, social interaction, multicultural education.

1. Introduction

The consequences of globalization have not left out their firm grip on education. Education is one of the reasons for the growing trend of multiculturalism, contributing significantly to the changing context of international settings the world over. Conspicuous of the trend has been the exodus of people from the developing countries to the developed world in search of better and different perspectives on education. Recently, an obvious trend is educational exchange programs, which permit students from the developed world to travel to the developing world and vice versa for education. The result of this trend is to help students develop an understanding of the interdependencies among the nations of the world, involving cultural, national, and global identifications (Banks 2007); intercultural environments increasingly characterize the teaching and learning sessions in universities. The business of teaching, as Banks (2007: 101) contends, is a “multicultural encounter” where teachers and students belong to diverse groups characterized by age, gender, religion, culture, social class, race and ethnicity.

For Miksch (2002), enrolling students from different cultural backgrounds is critical to accomplishing the mission of higher education. Various researchers (e.g., Banks & Banks 1995, Tetreault 2010, Banks 2007, Astin 1993, Chang 1999, Gurin et al. 2002) report that the quality of teaching and level of students’ achievements improve in classrooms where students are from culturally diverse backgrounds. Teachers who are competent in equity pedagogy are able to profit from diversity to enrich instruction and bring meaning to their classrooms and wider communities “instead of fearing or ignoring it” (Banks 2007:101). The long-term benefits of multicultural education include improved productivity, problem-solving skills, and

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relationships, with a corresponding reduction in prejudice and stereotyping. Multicultural education reinvigorates society, culminating in what Ameny-Dixon (2005: 1) describes as “a broader and more sophisticated view of the world”. Conversely, multicultural education is often detrimentally characterized by anxiety and disquieting experiences born out of ill-preparation, lack of information and consequent culture shock, on the part of educators, administrators and students alike (Blair 2003, Ameny-Dixon 2005).

According to Shulman and Mesa-Bains (1993), comprehensive understanding of the different cultural elements and extent of differences involving diverse cultures is a sure way of creating positive relations among cultures and inclusive programs that cater to the needs of all concerned. Unfortunately, diversity in universities and higher institutions of learning often brings about miscommunication and incoherence, heightening levels of anxiety and discomfort (Ozturgut 2011, Abdulai 2018). For this and other reasons, this study uses an exchange program between the University for Development Studies (UDS) in Ghana and Hochschule Dusseldorf University of Applied Sciences (HSD) in Germany to investigate students' experiences of and opinions concerning communication, relationships and commitments. The findings of the study should contribute to enriching global knowledge concerning international education, intercultural relations, and understanding of commitments in the midst of diverse cultures, with African insight and perspective. On the managerial level, it should guide and assist management of universities and other institutions of higher learning that are delving into, or are already into the provision of, global education in creating structures and conditions necessary to engender useful international education.

The paper is structured as follows: after the introduction, we review the relevant theoretical literature and illuminate the role of culture in teaching and learning in a multicultural setting. This is followed by research design, semi-structured interviews, comparison analysis and interpretation. Finally, we discuss the research findings, conclusions, limitations and directions for future research.

2. Literature review

2.1 Communicating across cultures in teaching and learning atmosphere

How do people communicate across cultures? Ting-Toomey (1999) writes that one way a person becomes a global citizen is by developing the knowledge and skills of conscious intercultural communication; such knowledge and skills are crucial since direct contact with people from different cultures has become the norm rather than the exception. To acquire such competencies, in Martin’s (1994) view, people need to be aware of their own assumptions, prejudices and stereotypes, as this forms the foundation for good interaction and effective learning. It is particularly important for teachers and learners in higher institutions of learning where, increasingly, it is becoming mandatory for universities in parts of the world to recruit staff and students from diverse cultures (Ameny-Dixon 2005). Universities need to determine appropriate responses to diverse and often conflicting behaviors, beliefs (including religious beliefs), value systems, and other ways of identifying oneself that students and staff bring along to the institutions (Banks 2007). Supporting heterogeneous teaching and learning environments helps students and staff alike to develop cross-cultural knowledge, skills and competencies.

Higher learning institutions are forums for building multicultural competencies. Hurtado (2005) postulates that people from diverse cultural backgrounds, in work-related settings (for example), appear to be more productive, creative and innovative compared to homogenous groups. Yet people experience setbacks from miscommunication. These cultural encounters would not be called to question if whatever one communicates in the midst of other cultures were well understood in a way he or she anticipates (Abdulai et al. 2017) without any culturally bound interpretations. In fact, communication is so embedded and omnipresent to
the extent that every exhibited behavior, including silence in the presence of another, is a form of communication (Abdulai et al. 2017). A person’s culture of orientation becomes a filter through which verbal and non-verbal messages are encoded and decoded (Abdulai et al. 2019, Alhassan 2011, Gudykunst 1998, Neuliep et al. 2001). Students and staff of higher-education institutions need to develop what Banks (2007: 122) terms “a sophisticated understanding of the diverse groups” because every intercultural exchange, to lesser or greater extent, is replete with some level of ethnocentrism (Neuliep & McCrosky 1997). According to Johnson (1995: 59), those who impart knowledge in multicultural settings must themselves be intercultural communicators, conscious of their own culturally oriented experiences, ever ready to learn from other cultures and showcase commitment in teaching others the art of communicating across cultures; they must be empathic toward other cultures and behaviors and acquire awareness of themselves as cultural beings.

It is worth noting that effective communication is often reliant and predicated on context, and intrinsically culture is part and parcel of context, which suggests therefore that communication is mostly inseparable from culture (Pricope 2013). Pricope’s belief is that the acquisition of intercultural competence by foreign students enhances effective communication with teachers and other intercultural groups, improves the communication capacity of students and minimizes situations of culture shock. It also eliminates ethnocentrism, which in turn prevents what Guan (1995) refers to as “self-centered dialogue”, a situation where interactants communicate with people while employing their own culture as the standard of measurement (Neuliep et al. 2001).

2.2 Relations in global multicultural educational settings

Until now, the predominating understanding of multicultural education, especially in the United States, has been the assimilation or “melting-pot” perspective, which suppresses micro-cultures into the macro-culture. The assimilation or “melting-pot” perspective relaxes the cultural identities of the micro-cultures of migrants to enable them to assume the identity of the macro-culture so as to blend or absorb the micro-cultures into the mainstream society (Ameny-Dixon 2005). Multicultural education is an idea, an educational movement, a process; its goal is to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to learn regardless of race, culture, gender, social class or ethnicity – even as some students are denied those equal opportunities because of their backgrounds (Banks 2007). Banks writes (2007: 82) that multicultural education is “an educational reform movement that tries to reform schools in ways that will give all students an equal opportunity to learn” through teaching strategies that empower students and give them voice. It aims to instill democratic ideals such as justice, equality and freedom, in schools and in society.

Today, the question of multicultural education is at the heart of discussions worldwide on educational reform. The ever-increasing forces of globalization have given exposure and, indeed, prominence to differences in cultures: values, social practices and individual attitudes (Nteliou & Kehajia 2016).

Zhao (2007) holds that, when teachers and students from diverse cultures encounter each other in the classroom, different behaviors in the form of changed attitudes and feelings result. Such encounters are, we would add, not limited to those between teachers and students but also among students, teachers and administrators and throughout the communities where the learning institutions are located. It is imperative that differences in behavior be managed well via intercultural competencies: e.g., through Bank’s (2007) dimensions of multicultural education (content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, and equity pedagogy); as well as through the empowerment of school culture and social structure. Otherwise, if the different attitudes and feelings get to extreme ends, misunderstandings ensue (Zhao 2007).
Zhao notes that classrooms in China are hierarchically organized, with students showing profuse respect toward teachers. Teachers anticipate students being obedient, quiet and attentive to them as well as inclined to follow their instructions religiously. Teachers normally stand in front of the class with all students facing their direction as a sign of dignity and authority. Such societies are characterized by high power distance. Students listen to the teacher without interrupting his delivery with questions, until the end of the session when they can ask questions. Teachers are formally addressed by their full titles.

2.3 Conceptualizing culture and learning
This study is built on both the dynamic and essentialist frameworks of culture. To begin with, the theory of cultural dynamism posits that culture is dynamic, fluid, and contextual (Långstedt 2018, Adler & Aycan 2018). This implies that culture is not static but is subject to change over time. This model of culture is contrary to the essentialist view of culture, which assumes that culture is homogenous, deterministic and static (Hofstede 1997, Hall 1976, Gudykunst 1998). In addition, the cultural dynamic paradigm assumes that culture exists in the interaction between actors and not within actors (Långstedt 2018: 7). In this regard, the interaction between individual and groups could influence the creation and re-creation of cultures and the attribution of meanings to the cultures created.

Theories of culture and learning are inextricably related. Learning always takes place in a cultural setting and is “always dependent on the utilization of cultural resources” (Bruner 1996: 4). Jandt (2004) writes how culture is learned and shared. The learning and sharing of cultural values and norms are made possible through language and other forms of communication. Language and communication are tools to share or transfer cultural values and norms from one generation to another. Culture influences how we adapt to both old and new learning environments and how we acquire new values, assumptions and systems of thinking.

To highlight the relationship between culture and learning, Kolb (1984: 38) defines learning as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. If one considers knowledge – what is it? …where does it come from? …how does one come by it? – one realizes that the answers to these questions have deep cultural roots (Bruner 1996). Parsons and Shils (1951) assert that learning is the process by which new elements of action orientation are acquired by the actors’ new cognitive orientation, new values, new objects and new expressive interests. Learning is not a product or a static concept but a holistic process. Hofstede (1997) observes that cultures cannot be acquired without learning, and learning cannot take place without sociocultural contexts. These concepts (culture and learning) will be applied to examine German and Ghanaian students’ experiences of how culture influences learning in their host universities during the course of their international exchange program.

3. Research design and methods
The study implements an anti-positivist research paradigm, which holds that reality is constructed and deconstructed by the actors engaged in the construction of meaning (Bryman 2004, Kuada 2012). The “angle of vision” (Mannheim, 1949: 245) we adopt is that of students’ experiences, perspectives and opinions on communication, relationships, and commitment to agreements. That angle of vision, together with the questions we posed, our assumptions, and our interpretation of the literature and our findings, is no doubt influenced by our culture and contexts. The results should be understood as a co-construction by all actors, using a case-study design. The case-study design is appropriate for describing or predicting processes associated with varieties of phenomena at the individual, group and organizational level (Yin 2003).
3.1 Access and interviews

To gain access to the study environment and subjects, a letter was written to the dean of faculty of education, University for Development studies, Ghana, requesting permission to carry out the study. Once approval was granted, participants were invited to take part through an introductory letter, which explained the rationale, ethical issues and duration of the study. Purposive sampling was used, meaning that the researcher selects the research participants based on his or her own judgment (Bryman 2004, Creswell 2009). The criteria for inclusion of both the German and Ghanaian study subjects were participation in the receiving university activities and effective interactions with domestic students and lecturers. Exclusion criteria were unwillingness to take part in the project and inadequate knowledge of the study context.

Individual semi-structured interviews were used. This type of interview encompasses a flexible set of questions where the study subjects are able to express their views about – in this case – their intercultural interactions and experiences in the receiving university and society (Bryman 2004). In order to gain insightful data, we designed an interview protocol, which comprised two main parts. The first part focused on participants’ demographic data, while the second delved into the interview questions. Participants were asked to explain their everyday experience based on their interactions with their lecturers, students and host society. They were also asked to provide examples of their learning experience and ways of sharing information, knowledge, and practices with others. In all, eleven interviews were conducted in two phases in July 2015 and August 2016. All the conversations were recorded with an audio recording device. Each interview lasted about one hour and ten minutes. One set of interviews was conducted with the German exchange students at UDS, Tamale campus. In all, six out of the ten German exchange students were interviewed. Another set was conducted with the Ghanaian students who had returned from Germany. Ten Ghanaian students from UDS went on the exchange program; five of the ten were interviewed at UDS Tamale campus. The research participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Representation of interview subjects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study subject code</th>
<th>Country code</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Name of study program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UA</td>
<td>GD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>empowerment studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BW</td>
<td>GD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>empowerment studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>CZ</td>
<td>GD</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>empowerment studies</td>
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<td>TY</td>
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<td>empowerment studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>VC</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>empowerment studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>MJ</td>
<td>GG</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>development education</td>
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<td>KL</td>
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<td>RT</td>
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<td>SR</td>
<td>GG</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>development education</td>
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<tr>
<td>AG</td>
<td>GG</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>development education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI</td>
<td>GG</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>development education</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

GG=Germany, GD=Ghana

The interviews were transcribed by listening to the audio recordings repeatedly. After the interview data was transcribed, it was then coded, organized into themes, categories, and sub-categories using the constant-comparison technique. Constant comparison refers to a process of maintaining a close connection between data and conceptualization so that the correspondence between concepts and categories is not lost (Bryman 2004, Abdulai et al. 2017). Using this technique, detailed, selective, and comprehensive reading of the entire transcribed data was done. After coding the data, we grouped it into themes. Classical content analysis was used to identify the main themes (Bryman 2004). The number of times each descriptive code occurred was ranked, and the most important concepts were identified as the
themes. For data interpretation, we adopted a hermeneutic or meaning-interpretation approach. Hermeneutics is the study of the interpretation of texts (see e.g. Neuman 2014). To make the interview data meaningful from the perspective of the interview participants, we quoted sections of the transcribed data and interpreted statements based on the responses of the participants.

3.2 Ethical considerations
Prior to the study, participants were given a letter of introduction that provided information about the research and what it meant to take part. All participants understood and agreed to take part. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary. Raw data (recordings and transcripts) were treated in a way that protected the anonymity of the study participants. We did not gather any personal data, such as names, ages, or addresses; and we removed any information that could make participants identifiable. The recordings were destroyed immediately after transcription.

4. Findings and discussion
In setting up the findings on cross-cultural learning experiences among exchange students from HSD in Germany and UDS in Ghana, we considered the key categories that were generated from the data. Those data were then discussed to reflect some of the theories used in the study and current empirical literature. In view of this, the following discussion is divided into three themes.

4.1 Theme One: Communication challenges under cultural coexistence
People have natural inclinations to be with similar others with whom they share common values, regulated by the same or familiar principles. Unfortunately, it is becoming common that people get disorientated by their removal from their comfort zones, as in this exchange program. What is usually taken for granted no longer holds, ushering in unfamiliar cultural encounters, which sometimes come with associated anxieties (Keles 2013, Alhassan 2011). The anxieties of creating common understandings with dissimilar others is inevitable. It is not surprising when one subject related that:

* Mmm. I think I have an example where I said something where my colleague couldn’t understand it. It was in a group work and we wanted to divide who will take which point and there was a misunderstanding and so two of us did the same point and one point was not worked on (PI 11).

This is a clear case of misunderstanding so grievous that a task was left undone owing to the fact that effective communication could not be sustained even in face-to-face interaction. As cultures continue to differ so will the way people communicate and subsequent behaviors affected because of perceptual difference in the way people view the world (Keles 2013). Samovar and Porter’s (1997) intercultural model postulates how meanings are lost when messages are encoded by a person in one culture and decoded by a person from a different culture in the context of their differing cultural backgrounds.

Adler (1991) is of the view that the wider the cultural orientation gaps between encoder and decoder, the greater the differences in meaning. Some scholars including Abdulai and colleagues (2019) are of the strong conviction that communication is even difficult between people who share a common language, evidence for which is revealed by the field data:

* Yeah. I think sometimes there were challenges but I expected before that there will be more challenges because I am not used to do all in English. My English is not as well as your English. For example, I expected more problems with the communication. But, I think it was ok, and we could understand each other. Of
course, sometimes there were some problems with words or we don’t use the same words or used in another contexts, or something like this. But, I think it was not a big problem (CZ3).

Based on similar studies (Abdulai et al. 2019, Abdulai & Ibrahim 2016, Samovar & Porter 1995), these researchers have argued that, even under the use of the same language, communication challenges may still be imminent on the grounds that the rules, principles and regulation of communication are determined by the social situation and culture. Despite the use of the English language by the exchange students from Germany and their Ghanaian counterparts, creating common meanings was still at a premium due to pronunciation and problems with slang. Abdulai and Ibrahim’s (2016) study further reveals that Ghanaians have a unique way of speaking the English language, which may not sync well with the Germans. This was corroborated by a German participant:

Eee... when people say music is local here, to me, local is not a bad thing, it just means it is from here, but here when someone says the music is too local, it comes with a negative connotation. Or when I ask people what they like about music they will say they like the beats, but sometimes I find they mean the rhythm, but sometimes they mean the song. So, there have been examples where someone tells me something and I also have to figure out what they mean by what they say (MJ 6).

The research participant was so challenged in trying to make her conversation understandable enough to her Ghanaian audience that she had to resort to non-verbal communication by way of gesture. Yet, this option was not helpful enough:

This morning I was trying to explain to the woman who does cleaning in my house that there was [sic] moles in my cupboard. She speaks English, but I think “moles” isn’t the word she knows. So, I was trying to mime moles, I was trying to give hand signals, but I mean how do you give a hand signal for moles? It is very complicated, so I tried, but it didn’t work, I had to show her the moles (KL7).

Nonverbal communication is no exception to the principle that it is the social situation and culture that determine the rules, principles and regulations to communication. The respondent’s frustration was occasioned by the difficulty creating meaning by both the encoder and decoder. Communicating via non-verbal behavior relies on tacit, culturally bound knowledge reposing in every person. It is only when a person is sufficiently oriented towards a new culture that he or she can encode and decode non-verbal behaviors with ease.

It is very frustrating for people to find themselves helplessly trying to communicate, but their efforts are yielding no results. People are often dumbfounded finding out systematic differences in perceptions with issues that are usually taken for granted, which end up building anxiety in communicating with people in new cultures (Rijamampianina 1999). When people are anxious because of new cultures they tend to feel awkward and pay attention to minor issues. This statement speaks to this issue of anxiety:

This for me is a bit disappointing. I also sometimes have the impression... may be due to the cultural differences, they do not take us seriously. They were laughing when we mentioned some arguments for example. so it was a bit disappointing .I had the impression that every time we say something for example may be something that is related to culture, people often felt offended immediately (SR 9).

This is an expression of frustration from communication behaviors that may be considered inappropriate. The quotation above smacks of ethnocentrism or at least a cultural divide as expressed in the laughter. Neuliep and McCroskey (1997) maintain that cultural expressions
simply are embedded with some degree of ethnocentrism. People naturally filter verbal and nonverbal messages using their own cultures’ biases, and by so doing end up judging aspects of others’ cultures using their own cultures as the standard. Thoughts of negativity toward or superiority over other cultures bring about this phenomenon. Those who engaged in the laughter thought the arguments substandard as far as their cultural orientation was concerned. The feeling of displeasure by those laughed at was born out of anxiety in experiencing new cultures. For all you know, if those who engaged in the laughter and those who were being laughed at were to have shared the same culture, they would not have taken any offense.

4.2 Theme Two: Perceived differences in social value systems
People develop serious attachment to their values systems, which have far-reaching implications on their actions and inactions. This is because people’s assumptions, needs and goals are shaped by their cultures of orientation, which are rooted deeply in the values they subscribe to. Values are significant, enduring and hard to change especially when they are palpable. The room arrangement style at the University for Development Studies, where all furniture faces the lecturer, emerged as a cause for concern cutting across most of the German students’ responses. One respondent succinctly put it this way:

*The seating arrangement differs from that of Germany. All seats are looking to the professor but [I] am used to sitting in [a] circle where students look at each other* (KL7).

Another respondent put it this way:

*Um... my first impression was that it is not the same as in Germany. Um especially, the room was different. In Germany the rooms are smaller and the seats are sitting often in a circle and not behind each other and it looks very different* (AG10).

This perceived difference in room size and seating arrangement can be interpreted to reflect the difference in the system of values of the cultures involved. Room size and seating arrangement could appear as artifacts, but they may be rooted deeply in underlying assumptions, which could be conscious or unconscious (Schein 2004). A seating arrangement that is round, with people facing each other, demonstrates an equitable distribution of power and equal opportunity to speak. This cultural situation aptly fits the power-distance dimension advanced by Hofstede (1986). Hofstede explains that inequity prevails within every culture, but the extent to which it is tolerated differs from one culture to the other. The German cultures belong to the small power-distance classification, which implies that the teacher respects the student’s independence. It is the student who is expected to initiate communication and speak at any point in the class. Ultimately, learning is judged to be effective based on the extent of two-way communication in class (Hofstede 1986). In high power-distance cultures such as Ghana and China, the situation is the opposite. The learning situation is teacher-centered, with the expectation on the teacher to initiate communication while the student only speaks up when permitted by the teacher. The effectiveness of the learning situation is judged by the teacher’s excellence (Alhassan & Abosi 2014).

Closely related is a perceived difference in the value of respect. The German exchange students appeared confused about the way the Ghanaian students behaved towards their lecturers. This is how a respondent highlighted it:

*And also the relations between the lecturer and the students is another issue. The problem is, I think it is more hierarchical here. I was not used to somebody carry, for example, the laptop of the lecturer and organize the beamer something like that. In Germany the lecturers do it* (PI 11).
To the Ghanaian, this is a show of respect, which is a social value firmly rooted in the Ghanaian culture, particularly the part of the country (Northern Region) where the university is situated. If you are raised in Ghana, assisting the elderly and the weak is one of the vital mental programs that will be inculcated into you. Aside from the fact that teachers are held in high esteem in Ghanaian culture, age is a serious factor when it comes to showing regard and respect. People willingly assist their lecturers, elders and all those in respected positions because of the social positions they occupy. In the Ghanaian hierarchy of values, such respect sits near the top. These behaviors were quite bizarre and outlandish to the German respondents and could not be taken as a mark of respect in their culture.

Another obvious perceived difference in social values concerns private space. One of the participants from Germany noticed how people could intrude into her private space:

*I think in southern Ghana, personally, eeh... the way people interacted with me was not the best, they did not respect my space. So they touched me more, eeh.... It still happens in Tamale, but I experienced it less as I do in places like Accra* (KL 7).

Many cultures have consideration on how space is viewed, especially when it comes to the space to leave when communicating with someone and the act of touching. Some cultures allow for much private space and leave little space for public and vice versa. The respondent’s statement could be interpreted to mean that she belongs to a culture that allows for much private space and frowns upon unexpected touching. She expected to maintain a comfortable zone when engaging in face-to-face talks and considered unexpected touching as an embarrassment and invasion of privacy, even if well intentioned -- even as such behavior is considered normal by most Ghanaians, particularly the youth, who take it for granted and assume it as part of their usual demeanor. This kind of demeanor belongs to the category of values that are held or exhibited unconsciously; but the impact on the new culture is significant. Embedded in this respondent’s statement is an experience of different values within the same national culture. The respondent appears to attribute disregard for her private space and unexpected touching to prevail more in the southern part of Ghana and less in the north, which she thinks could be born out of religious values.

The Ghanaian students likewise realized that there are aspects of the German culture worthy of emulation and others they did not appreciate, as evidenced in this statement:

*But when it comes to culture and socialization, well, there are some of their cultures we really admired Their sense of urgency, their responsiveness to issues, their maintenance culture, sanitary, thus, the way they maintain their environment are things that we can learn from them. But the other side is that they live very individualistic life, so it happen that you can stay in a flat with somebody for more than one year, you will not even have opportunity to chat with the person and to me that is very bad because as one who believes in communal values...* (UA 1).

The Ghanaian students realized that the Germans were imbued with a swift sense of urgency, with good ambience and cleanliness, which they felt like having as part of their own culture. Conversely, the Ghanaians disliked the individualistic aspect of the German culture, since they believed in communalism. As globalization exposes people to other cultures, people will find some aspects of other cultures to be good and desirable while repudiating others.

### 4.3 Theme Three: Time, tasks and agreements

Just as different cultures have different conceptions and assumptions about how people relate to one another, so is their approach to agreements, tasks and time. The interview data revealed that the students from HSD in Germany and UDS in Ghana had different conceptions of and approaches to agreements, tasks and time. As a German exchange student explained:
The above interview excerpt not only reveals the commitment of the German students to time concerning lectures and other meetings, but it also exposes some Ghanaian students’ and lecturers’ relatively lax attitudes to time and thereby reporting late. The statement further points out that those lecturers who usually showed up late to lectures did not often care to apologize to students for their actions, but rather saw their behavior as normal. This understanding is congruent with Hall’s (1976) postulation that monochronic cultures like Germany’s view time as a linear process and tend to do one thing at a time (see also Ting-Toomey 1999). These cultures see time as something that can be compartmentalized between tasks, personal and social dimensions, and plotted towards future events and activities. The German students whose culture is rooted in monochronic philosophy are most likely to consider time as a precious and scarce commodity and not have a negative attitude to time. To the contrary, the Ghanaian students are most likely not to put their activities in a sequential plan to realize their desired goals and not value time as a precious and scarce commodity, because they are socialized in a polychronic time philosophy. Most Ghanaian students in a Ghanaian context are not slaves to time, but rather may use time to guide them to structure their daily activities. A Ghanaian exchange student at HSD in Germany was asked about her opinion of the commitment of the German students to time. She explained:

*The Germans are very transparent and committed to whatever they planned to do. If they agreed with you to do something at say 6 o’clock the next day, eeh… they will do as planned. They are very different when it comes to commitment to time and plans. Eeh…they are not like us (VC 5).*

In her opinion, the German students were more committed to time and plans. The German students’ commitment to time and plans, and their conception of time as something precious and scarce, may be attributed to their upbringing or acculturation. The economic value of time may be embedded in the German social system, which has been transmitted from generation to generation. When a question was asked about the time students spent during lectures, a German student said:

*Usually, students spent 1 hour 30mins for a lecture at HSD, but sitting for three hours for a lecturer without a break at the University for Development studies is tiresome (RT8).*

The German students were not comfortable with lectures which extended beyond 1:30 minutes without break. In their view, a lecture which extends beyond 1:30 minutes not only affects teaching and learning, but makes it difficult for students to assimilate what has been taught. In Ghana, most students and lecturers are used to long hours for lectures, because most lecturers do not start lectures at the start of the semester. In some cases, lectures may start in the middle of the semester, and this may compel the lecturer to go beyond the time scheduled for the course.

Review of the interview data illuminated different conceptions and understandings of tasks and agreements between the German and Ghanaian students. The interviewees were asked to share their experiences regarding group work; two of the German students had this to say:

*We were given a group assignment and my impression was that our colleagues from Ghana were not well prepared for the group work. When they are assigned to do something, they simply do not inform themselves about what they have to...*
talk about. Sometimes, I have the impression that they rely on us because they are aware we will be well prepared (AG10).

Emm... in fact I sometimes get disappointed in my Ghanaian colleagues. I cannot hide this. Especially, when the course is about development education and social change (SR 9).

The view expressed suggests that some of the students they had worked with in groups were ill-prepared for group assignments, presentations and discussions. This is in harmony with Hofstede’s (1997) concept of cultural awareness, which holds that individuals carry different “mental software” because of the way they were brought up. Differences in students’ socialization processes can have an effect on approaches to group work. This also resonates with Kolb’s (1984) postulation that cultures cannot be acquired without learning, and learning cannot take place without sociocultural context. The inability of Ghanaian students to contribute effectively during group discussions and presentations may be attributed to their teacher-centered education culture, as against the student-centered educational approach practiced in Germany.

This raises significant questions about the institutional culture of Ghanaian universities. School culture and social structure, as Banks (2007: 95) contends, are powerful determining factors for “how students learn to perceive themselves”. It is imperative that lecturers have pedagogical competence toward improving social interactions among students and between students and lecturers (Alhassan & Abosi 2014).

The views expressed by the German students can be interpreted to mean that they were disappointed in the work culture of some Ghanaian students. The second respondent in particular suggests that development education and social change students should be agents of change and good ambassadors for development.

The same question was asked to the Ghanaian students who went to Germany, and one of the interview subjects revealed:

Err... they start agreement with trust. Right from the moment you start agreement with them, they trust that you are going to do your part as they also do their part.
So there is no suspicion right from the beginning of the agreement (BW 2).

The statement may be interpreted to mean that Germans are highly committed to agreement, and their commitment to agreement is based on trust. It implies that, in the context of German culture, agreements are like social contracts for the parties who have agreed to execute an action.

5. Conclusion

This paper discusses cross-cultural experiences between students involved in an exchange program between universities in Germany and Ghana. Clearly, the students from the two universities exhibited different conceptualizations and approaches to agreements, tasks and time. The exchange students from Germany exhibited a high commitment to agreements, tasks and time, while their Ghanaian counterparts (teachers and students) were doing the direct opposite. Essentially, the communication process was muddled by incidents of ineffective communication, which resulted in unproductive outcomes for group assignments. Perceived value differences were also evident, informed by differences in values of certain social structures. The students from Germany and Ghana differed sharply on the notion of respect and how it should be extended to superiors, based on the different mental programming of their respective cultural orientations. The power relations within the two universities – hierarchical versus flat teacher-student relationships – were obvious. Likewise discernible was the perceived difference in managing personal space.
We recommend that, in exchange programs of this nature, cultural learning about other cultures should be taken seriously by both students and teachers to avoid culture shock, misunderstanding, miscommunication and relational conflict. In creating a conducive teaching and learning environment, institutions should take into consideration the social value structures of the cultures involved so as to provide an enabling environment cutting across all the cultures concerned.

5.1 Limitations of the study
It is important that the study be carefully interpreted, given that it seeks to explore only the experiences, perceptions and opinions of exchange students from the UDS in Ghana and HSD in Germany, in terms of their cross-cultural experiences. Generalizing the findings beyond the experiences of the exchange students from these institutions is not possible. The situation encountered here might or might not be applicable to other situations. A sample size of eleven is relatively small. Nonetheless, future researchers can build on our findings.

5.2 Recommendations for future research
A high level of commitment to agreements, tasks and time is desirable, with high yielding prospects for productivity and intercultural cohesion and harmony. Future research could explore the deep-rooted cultural assumptions of German students that explain their high proclivity to keeping to agreements, tasks and time commitments and that of Ghanaian students and lecturers’ laissez faire attitude to agreements, tasks and time.

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References


Three Peoples Divided by a Common Language: Cultural Pitfalls in International Negotiations Between the United States and the United Kingdom and Ireland

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Abstract: There is a general assumption that there is no serious communication barrier among speakers of a common language. This action research study examines that assumption in the context of intercultural communication among three English-speaking teams, with each team representing a major national travel organization located in the USA, Ireland, and the UK respectively. The results of an online survey sent to all participants (N = 82) indicate stark differences between the US and the UK/Ireland respondents’ perceptions of the quality of communication and the effectiveness of their cooperation on a day-to-day basis. The causes of these differences are examined, recommendations are offered for ways in which cultural pitfalls can be avoided, and suggestions are provided for avenues for future research.

Keywords: common language, negotiation, action research.

1. Introduction

The English and Americans are two peoples divided by a common language.

This statement is widely attributed to Ireland’s George Bernard Shaw, even though this observation never appeared in any of his writings. Yet most English-speaking peoples do not realize just how great the differences can be between British, Irish and American English. According to Swaab, Postmes, and Spears (2008), there are over 4,000 words used every day in the United States that are not in the lexicon of British and Irish English. For example, “bleachers”, “busboy”, “podiatrist”, “odometer”, and “valance” are not used at all in the UK or Ireland, while British English terms such as “over the moon”, “flyover”, “dual carriageway” and “slip road” are meaningless to most Americans. Similarly, “blackguard”, “craic”, and “Taoiseach” are generally meaningless to non-Irish speakers of English (the latter two being Irish words that are commonly used by English speakers in Ireland).

However, the three countries are close trading partners, and both the UK and Ireland are major recipients of foreign direct investment by US-based firms. The Republic of Ireland, in particular, has emerged as a key stakeholder in relations between US firms and their operations in the United Kingdom and the rest of the European Union, with many US-based multinationals having established primary or support facilities in Ireland.

Since good communication among trading partners is essential to successful business relationships, it is appropriate to identify factors that may create barriers to effective communication, especially within a common language, and to consider ways of mitigating them. As Shenkar notes in a testimonial on the back cover to Piekkari, Welch and Welch (2015), the quality of communication between a firm and its employees, customers, suppliers and partners overseas is crucial to the firm’s success:

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Although much research has been done on intercultural communication among organizations that do not share a common language (e.g., Brannen, Piekkari & Tietze 2014; Feely & Harzing 2003; Harzing & Pudelko 2013; Neeley & Dumas 2015), there is a general assumption that there is no serious communication barrier among speakers of a common language. This assumption has been reinforced in the international business literature by studies that have found similar cultural values among Anglophones (e.g. Hofstede 1983, 2001; Ronen & Shenkar 1985; Schwartz 1992). Yet even though cultural values in the USA, the UK and the Republic of Ireland are thought to be similar, subtle differences persist that spill over into both linguistic and non-linguistic behaviors. Anecdotal evidence suggests that US executives, for example, often find it difficult to adjust to living in the UK or Ireland, since they arrive with the expectation that life in these countries will be similar to life at home; over time, the subtle differences in both cultural values and language use can create cognitive dissonance, triggering culture shock. Even short-term trips across the Atlantic can cause confusion as Americans mistake the ground floor for the first floor, a subway for an entrance to the Underground, and look for the animal at the zebra crossing or the circus in Piccadilly. The difference between hoods and bonnets, trunks and boots can make even negotiating one’s way around a rental car more difficult. In business meetings, further confusion occurs when the British/Irish party wants to table a topic on the agenda while the US party agrees and then, contrary to expectations, refuses to discuss the topic further.

This empirical study examines intercultural communication among marketing teams within the travel sector of three key international motor club associations, based in the USA, the UK, and the Republic of Ireland. Hereafter, the employees in Ireland will be referred to as Irish; the employees in the UK will be referred to as British, to include English, Welsh and Scots. This article is structured as follows: first, we present a background to the marketing alliance, the research questions that motivated this study, and a discussion of the research design. Then we review the literature on cultural values and intercultural communication, and specifically on communication and negotiation between the USA, the UK and Ireland, followed by a section on the research method. The results of the data analysis are then presented and discussed, and we conclude with the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

In 1988, the three travel organizations covered by the study signed a mutual alliance agreement to share best practices in order to cross-sell one another’s travel services and align their business unit strategies. Later, the agreement included promoting one another’s online products. In terms of revenue performance, this international relationship has been very strong for 30 years. The teams communicate with one another at least weekly via email, telephone and, occasionally, video conferencing.

However, there have been a number of communication issues and challenges with product development based on review guidelines. The supervisor of the American team received contradictory feedback from the teams: while the American team expressed satisfaction with the conduct of the regular meetings, the British and Irish teams expressed dissatisfaction and frustration with the American team and complained that the Americans were sometimes difficult to understand. Even though the Americans, Irish and British speak a mostly common language, there appeared to be an opportunity to improve the understanding of each organization’s needs and project initiatives by promoting cultural awareness and clearer verbal communication. In addition, the initial feedback received by the supervisor of the US marketing team indicated that many US team members viewed these as minor issues.
while their counterparts in the UK and Ireland considered them to be a potential threat to the alliance, so there was a need to investigate further to confirm that the partnership continued to be beneficial to all three parties.

The following research questions drove this study:

1. Does the use of a common language affect the quality of communication with the participants’ counterparts in the USA or UK/Ireland?
2. To what extent has the relationship with the partner(s) in USA or UK/Ireland been beneficial for the participants’ organization?
3. To what extent do the participants enjoy working with their counterparts in the USA or UK/Ireland?

The impetus for this study was the perception by the British and Irish teams that the communication issues with the US team posed a threat to the alliance, so action research was determined to be the most effective way to clearly identify the issues and to design appropriate action to remedy the situation. Action research is a commonly used paradigm for management research (Eden & Huxham 1996); it is intended to focus on changing the organization by reflecting on the data that is gathered, designing appropriate action and developing theory based on the research findings. Action research differs from academic research in that practitioners need to gather data quickly in order to make timely decisions but, like academic research, it should be grounded in theory. Because the investigator is seeking an answer to a specific problem or issue, the method used to gather data is often specific to the situation and cannot be applied to a different population, thus limiting the generalizability of the findings. In this case, the supervisor of the US team was in the position to involve the members of all three teams in the research study, putting him in the role of both an investigator and a consumer of the research output. The next section reviews the literature that underpins this research study.

2. Intercultural communication and negotiation

2.1 Theoretical background
This study is based on two theoretical streams of research: intercultural communication Gudykunst (2003) and cultural values (Hofstede 1983, 2001; House et al. 2004; Meyer 2014). Gudykunst identified intercultural communication as exchanges in interpersonal settings between individuals from different cultures: for example, how a Japanese executive greets a German executive. Successful intercultural communication requires knowledge of cross-cultural communication: that is, understanding the differences in business customs, beliefs and values, and communication strategies between one’s own culture and another culture. Language differences, high-context vs. low-context cultures (Hall 1976), and nonverbal differences such as power distance (Hofstede 1983, 2001), time orientation and attitudes towards negotiation and business meetings (Hall 1976) are all major factors that can affect intercultural communication (Samovar & Porter 2013). These are discussed in detail in the following sub-sections.

2.2 Cultural values and communication
In low-context cultures, which include most English-speaking nations, in-group and out-group relationships are flexible, there is little ambiguity in the spoken language, and decisions are made on the basis of facts rather than intuition. The UK, Ireland and the USA are generally regarded as low-context cultures. All three national cultures score highly on Hofstede’s (1983) Individualism dimension (≥70) and low on the Power Distance dimension ≤40), suggesting that in all three national cultures hierarchy in the workplace is established for convenience, superiors are accessible, and managers rely on individual employees and teams
for their expertise. Furthermore, both managers and employees expect to be consulted, information is shared frequently, and communication is informal, direct and participative (Hofstede et al. 2010). However, Martin (2005: 237) comments on the “indirectness, face, lack of confrontation and non-assertiveness” that has been observed of communication among Irish speakers of English, while the GLOBE study of national cultures (House et al. 2004) recorded a relatively low score for Ireland on the equivalent of the Individualism dimension, and a relatively high score for perceptions of Power Distance; these findings indicate a greater importance of the context of communication among English speakers in Ireland.

2.3 Time orientation
The perception of time is another aspect of culture that can affect communication styles (Hall 1976). The monochronic approach views time as a precious resource that is linear and sequential, with a focus on scheduling activities and completing them one at a time; monochronic cultures include the Anglo-Saxon and Germanic nations, such as the USA, UK, Germany and the Netherlands. Polychronic orientations, as in much of southern Europe, Latin America and the Middle East, view time as an abundant resource that allows the simultaneous occurrence of many things and the involvement of many people. Although most scholars include English-speaking Ireland among the monochronic cultures, some view Ireland as being closer to the polychronic cultures of southern Europe, such as Portugal, Spain and Italy (Tuleja 2009).

3. Negotiation and the communication process
Even within the same culture, misunderstandings can occur in negotiations if the parties are unaware of each other’s goals, assumptions, and preferred communication and negotiation style. In an international business context, the potential for miscommunication and incorrect assumptions is magnified, since culture can have a profound influence on people’s preferred negotiating style.

3.1 Cultural values and negotiation
Negotiators from low Power Distance cultures tend to be comfortable with democratic structures and flat organizational hierarchies, shared authority, and the right to use power only in limited circumstances and for legitimate purposes (Minkov & Hofstede 2011). The US, UK and Ireland all fall into this category, with the caveat, as noted above, that the GLOBE study gives Ireland a higher score on Power Distance. Yet researchers have identified differences in negotiating styles between Europe and the USA. European dealmakers, in general, prefer to exchange information first, while negotiators from the United States tend to trade offers at the beginning (Lewis 2010). Gunia and his colleagues suggest that cultural attitudes toward interpersonal trust explain the differences in negotiating styles (Gunia, Brett, Nandkeolyar & Kamdar 2011). They found that American managers were more likely than their British counterparts to believe that an opposing negotiator was being honest with them. They also found that British negotiators were less likely than Americans to trust their negotiation partner, which resulted in lower joint gains. Meyer (2014) noted that although the USA and the UK are both classified as task-based societies, as opposed to relationship-based, the UK falls lower on her Trusting scale than the USA. Gunia and colleagues (2011) also state that the impact of a negotiator’s mindset (linear versus holistic) affects the successful use of the substantiation-and-offer strategy to negotiate joint gains. Linear thinkers tend to settle one issue at a time, while holistic thinkers delay agreement on single issues until they can see how all of the issues fit together. The British and Irish are considered more holistic thinkers than Americans and are continuously looking at “the big picture” compared with their American counterparts (Gunia et al. 2011).
Compared with many other cultures, Irish and British business professionals appear to approach their work in a more detached and emotionless way. Lewis (2010) observes that the Irish, compared to Americans, tend to be more low-key and inclined to seek harmony. Referring specifically to the people of England, and excluding the Welsh, Scots and Northern Irish who make up the rest of the UK, he notes that the English tend to look for objective facts and solid evidence, rendering emotional persuasion techniques futile. Similarly, facial expressions tend to be kept to a minimum in the UK, thus making it difficult to guess the thoughts and opinions of British negotiators. This behavior is not suspicious or mistrustful; it is just the typical professional approach in the UK. While Americans tend to use aggressive selling techniques, such as derogatory remarks about the competition, such a tactic would probably have very little positive influence on British and Irish business partners and actually be counterproductive (Katz 2006).

Although British and Irish negotiators are rated as moderately aggressive, US negotiators are amongst the highest rated in perceived aggressiveness (Gunia et al. 2011). Katz (2006) observed that while US negotiators tend to seek a win-win proposition, they may be very competitive in their approach to negotiations, starting out with a firm bargaining position; they tend to be energetic, confident, and persistent; they enjoy arguing their positions and see things universally: i.e., they like to talk about broad applications of ideas; they tend to concentrate on one issue at a time; they focus on areas of disagreement, not areas of commonality or agreement; they prefer closure and certainty to open-endedness or fuzziness.

Negotiators from monochronic cultures such as the USA and the UK tend to prefer prompt beginnings and endings, deal with one agenda item at a time, prefer to talk in sequence, and view lateness as devaluing or as evidence of a lack of respect toward the overall business environment (Minkov & Hofstede 2011). Another dimension of time relevant to negotiations is the focus on past, present, or future. The United States tends to be oriented to the present and the near future (Hofstede et al. 2010); indeed, the US and Ireland both score low on Hofstede’s Long-Term Orientation (LTO) dimension, indicating a focus on the present and short term. In contrast, the UK’s score on LTO is in the middle of the scale, so no clear determination is possible.

### 3.2 Business meetings

As in the United States, business meetings in the UK and Ireland are an intrinsic feature of corporate life. They vary in their style and content compared to the United States in terms of overall demeanor but are seen as a key element of business communications. In the United States, the structure of meetings tends to be looser, while the British and Irish tend to focus more on the end goal. It is a standard practice in all three cultures to ensure that agendas are circulated in advance of any meeting, to enable everyone to be fully prepared to provide feedback prior to each meeting (Katz 2006). Technology has extended its influence into the world of meetings; video conferencing and conference calls mean that managers do not have to travel too far to attend a meeting. Telecommuting saves organizations the costs of travel and time but does not allow face-to-face personal contact, which some cultures may find unsatisfactory, like the United States (Gunia et al. 2011).

To summarize, the literature indicates that while there are many cultural similarities between the US, the UK and Ireland, very few studies focus specifically on cultural differences between the three. Nevertheless, subtle cultural differences do exist that may have an impact on the effectiveness of intercultural communication, such as differences in intonation, register and pitch (Crystal 2003), as well as differences in assumptions and expectations about the purpose of business meetings and how they should be conducted. Those differences that do exist are not clearly defined and, in many cases, there is no
consensus among researchers about the nature of the differences or their impact, if any, on effective intercultural communication. Therefore, we chose to conduct an exploratory study to elucidate these differences in the convenience sample available. In the following section, we explain how we developed and administered an online survey to the employees of the three travel companies who communicate regularly with one another.

4. Method

The research questions sought information about the respondents’ perceptions and opinions of, and attitudes towards, the alliance and their own interactions with their transatlantic counterparts, so a descriptive research design was used within an action-research paradigm. The goal was to identify aspects of the alliance where there was incongruity between the US team on one side and the UK and Irish teams on the other and, based on the data gathered, to develop action items to realign goals and improve communication. Two online surveys were prepared, each consisting of nineteen items with responses on a five-point Likert-type scale (1-Strongly Disagree to 5-Strongly Agree) related primarily to communication and negotiation. Due to the relatively small population available (N = 83), the survey was not pretested, but the two versions were reviewed by an academic third party to ensure face validity and the absence of ambiguous or confusing items.

The items were presented in random order and several items were reverse scored to reduce the possibility of common-method variance (Chang, Witteloostuijn & Eden 2010). Five items asked about the respondents’ perceptions of the ease of communicating with their counterparts in the partner organization(s) across the Atlantic; four items focused on their perceptions of negotiating with those counterparts; six items asked about the perceived benefits of the partnership with the other organization(s); three items asked about their satisfaction with interpersonal interactions with the counterparts. A further item, not reported here, asked about the respondents’ favorite aspect of working with the partner organization(s), and additional questions gathered data on the respondents’ length of service with their employer and demographic data. The instructions for completing the survey are attached in the appendix.

One survey was sent via email, with a brief cover letter asking for voluntary participation, to the 39 British employees and 23 Irish employees (N = 62) who handle the day-to-day relationship between their motor club organization and the American partner. The second survey, also with a brief cover letter asking for voluntary participation, was sent to the 21 employees of the American motor club in the USA, and for these employees the British and Irish clubs were identified as the partner organization. The survey for the US employees contained identical items about their perceptions of the quality of communication and negotiation with the British and Irish teams and of the benefit of the partnership to their own organization.

5. Analysis and results

5.1 British/Irish views of the alliance

Only one person did not respond to the survey that was sent to the British and Irish teams, which resulted in an overall 98.4% response rate (N = 61). Of the respondents, 70% had worked with their respective motor club for over five years and 59% had interacted directly with the US partner for more than two years. As expected, all 38 of the British team resided in Great Britain, and all 23 of the Irish team lived in Ireland, but there were several differences in national origin: 39 team members were of British origin, 21 of Irish origin, and 1 of American origin. Fifty-three respondents (87%) had visited the USA at least once. The percentage of males to females was 56% to 44% and the majority of the respondents (84%)
were under 55 years of age. Table 1 lists the survey items and summary results; for convenience and clarity, the items in Table 1 are grouped into four general categories: (1) communication, (2) negotiation, (3) benefits of the alliance and (4) personal interaction. However, as noted above, the items on the administered survey were in random order.

**Table 1: Survey items and summary results.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item (* = reverse-scored item)</th>
<th>Mean/mode Britain/Ireland</th>
<th>Mean/mode USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*I have difficulty understanding my American counterparts.</td>
<td>4.0 / 5.0</td>
<td>2.1 / 2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Language is the most difficult barrier when it comes to working with my American counterparts.</td>
<td>4.8 / 5.0</td>
<td>1.9 / 2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy the communication style of my American counterparts.</td>
<td>3.1 / 3.0</td>
<td>5.0 / 5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can clearly understand my American counterparts.</td>
<td>3.3 / 3.0</td>
<td>4.2 / 5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My communication style matches my American counterparts.</td>
<td>3.1 / 3.0</td>
<td>4.4 / 5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy negotiating with the American team on various projects and deliverables.</td>
<td>3.8 / 4.0</td>
<td>5.0 / 5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My motor club has equal footing when it comes to negotiating or discussing topics with the American team.</td>
<td>4.8 / 5.0</td>
<td>4.6 / 5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual negotiations with all three teams have been ultimately successful.</td>
<td>4.5 / 5.0</td>
<td>4.7 / 5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly meetings between all three partners are conducted in an effective manner.</td>
<td>2.5 / 2.0</td>
<td>5.0 / 5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The American team provides insights that my motor club did not think of.</td>
<td>4.2 / 5.0</td>
<td>4.1 / 5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My motor club has benefited from working directly with the American partner.</td>
<td>4.3 / 5.0</td>
<td>4.4 / 5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My expectations have been met while working with the American team.</td>
<td>3.7 / 4.0</td>
<td>4.2 / 5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I consider the American team open-minded.</td>
<td>4.1 / 4.0</td>
<td>4.4 / 5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I consider the American team innovative.</td>
<td>4.3 / 4.0</td>
<td>3.9 / 4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I consider working with the American partner as a benefit to my organization.</td>
<td>4.2 / 4.0</td>
<td>4.6 / 5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In general, I enjoy working with the American partner and its American staff.</td>
<td>4.5 / 5.0</td>
<td>4.7 / 5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The American partner is very flexible company to work with.</td>
<td>3.7 / 3.0</td>
<td>4.8 / 5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy our partnership with the American partner.</td>
<td>4.8 / 5.0</td>
<td>4.9 / 5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results in Table 1 include the mean and mode scores for each item. They indicate positive feedback on the five-point scale in terms of personal interaction with the US team on the items *In general, I enjoy working with the American partner and its American staff* (mean 4.5) and *I enjoy our partnership with the American partner* (mean 4.8). However, the US team was viewed as somewhat inflexible (mean 3.7). Similarly, although most respondents had a positive view of the benefits of the alliance on most items (means >4.1), the mean score for *My expectations have been met while working with the American team* dropped to 3.7. In terms of negotiation with their US counterparts, most respondents expressed satisfaction with the outcomes of negotiation (mean 4.5) and with their organization being viewed as an equal by the American team (mean 4.8), but there was general dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of weekly meetings (mean 2.5), with 85% of the respondents scoring this item 3 or lower.
When asked what they enjoyed most about working with the US team, the most common answers were the revenue results (46%) and the American people (28%). The pattern of scores reflected general satisfaction with the outcomes of the alliance with the US partner, but some dissatisfaction with processes, in particular the perceived inflexibility on the US side, unmet expectations, and ineffective weekly meetings. The scores on communication items reflected further dissatisfaction with processes, including strong agreement with Language is the most difficult barrier when it comes to working with my American counterparts (mean 4.8) and I have difficulty understanding my American counterparts (mean 4.0). The scores on the three other Communication items also reflected perceived difficulties in communicating with the US team: I enjoy the communication style of my American counterparts and My communication style matches that of my American counterparts (both means 3.1); I can clearly understand my American counterparts (mean 3.3).

5.1 US views of the alliance
The second online survey was sent via email to the 21 employees of the US team, with all 21 returning completed surveys (100% response rate). Nineteen of the 21 team members were born and raised in United States, and 20 out of 21 members had worked with the alliance since its inception in 1988. The US team was significantly older than the UK/Ireland teams, with 76% falling into the 55 to 70 age bracket, versus only 16% in UK/Ireland; and 71% of the respondents had visited the UK or Ireland at least once. The general perspective from the US team was that everything was going extremely well with the alliance. All 21 US employees expressed strong agreement (5 on the scale) for the following three items: I enjoy the communication style of my British and Irish counterparts; I enjoy negotiating with the British and Irish teams; and Weekly meetings with all three partners are conducted in an effective manner.

Interestingly, the lowest score on the US survey was for the reverse-scored item Language is the most difficult barrier when it comes to working with my British and Irish counterparts with a score of 1.9, indicating strong disagreement with the statement. This compared with a score of 4.8 on the same item from the British and Irish teams. The only other item that scored below 3.9 was another reverse-scored item, I have difficulty understanding my British and Irish counterparts. Taken together, the scores on Communication indicate that the US team perceived few barriers to communication with their British and Irish counterparts. The US perspective on negotiation was similarly positive, with no items scoring below 4.6 on the five-point scale. There was convergence, too, among all teams’ perspectives of the benefit of the alliance, although the US team viewed their counterparts as more flexible and less innovative than the British and Irish teams viewed them. When asked about the best part of working with their counterparts, the US results differed again, with 46% selecting “people (the team)” and 17% selecting “revenue results”, in contrast to the British/Irish teams who preferred the revenue results (46%), followed by the US team (28%).

6. Discussion
The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has occurred. – attributed to George Bernard Shaw

All three parties to the alliance found it to be beneficial to their own organization and reported that they enjoyed working with their transatlantic counterparts. However, there was a marked difference in their perceptions of the quality of communication with their partner organization(s), with the British/Irish teams viewing the mutual language as a
barrier to effective communication and the US team perceiving few problems in communicating with their counterparts.

6.1 Implications for managers
Key takeaways from the British/Irish survey show that three areas in particular scored low on the survey: negotiating with the US team; language as a means of communication; and the conduct of meetings. Supplementary written responses confirmed the general perception that that the US team members were too eager to launch products without proper quality assurance, would plan meetings for a shorter duration than needed, and were very shrewd negotiators.

Out of the 61 British/Irish surveys, 25 respondents (41%) stated that the Americans wanted everything done “too fast”. Several respondents also stated that American slang terms were used too often in meetings and caused confusion when US team members were presenting to the key travel executives of the British and Irish teams. According to the British and Irish travel executives who attended one such meeting, plans to launch marketing campaigns in the UK and Ireland that had been successful in the United States were hindered due to a lack of understanding of the information that was presented by the American team. Additionally, there were concerns surrounding the implementation and execution of each process presented by the Americans since there was a perception that “items tend to be rushed”.

The combined survey results indicate that all three teams appreciated the positive benefits and interactions of the alliance, with only minor differences in the scores on most items in these areas. Two areas of difference were My expectations have been met while working with the [partner] team[s] and Our partner is very flexible to work with; on both these items, the aggregate score of the US team was significantly higher than that of the British/Irish teams: 4.2 versus 3.7 and 4.8 versus 3.7, respectively.

It is evident from the survey results that there is a clear gap between the American team members’ perceptions of their own communication and negotiation styles and the perceptions of their British and Irish colleagues. As noted in the previous section, the British and Irish team members have strong reservations about the communication style of the US team, which one British respondent referred to as a “massive” struggle when working with the Americans, whereas the US team’s perceptions were that there were few barriers to effective communication. This disparity spills over to the teams’ perceptions of negotiation. Two negotiation items that stand out are I enjoy negotiating with [partner] on various projects and deliverables and Weekly meetings between the partners are conducted in an effective manner. Again, the US perceptions of these items were very positive, with an aggregate score of 5.0 for both items, while the British/Irish teams scored only 3.8 and 2.5 respectively.

Kimmel (1994) describes United States negotiators as hard to understand due to variance in word usage, and he ascribes this to a lack of racial or cultural homogeneity in the USA. While it is difficult to truly characterize any national or cultural approach to negotiation, generalizations can be helpful to the extent that they act as guides to working effectively with other cultures. Any generalization, however, depends on multiple contextual factors, including time, location, situation, goals, history between the parties, nature of the issue, individual preferences, interpersonal dynamics and mood.

There is an assumption that the common language shared by all three teams in our study should facilitate communication and collaboration on projects, but there is evidently a communication gap and a different perception of the negotiation process between the US team on one side and the British/Irish teams on the other. Some of the
differences could be ascribed to a generational gap between the US team and the British/Irish teams. However, research suggests that cultural factors might provide a better explanation of these differences. Hofstede (1983) found differences among the three countries in several cultural dimensions, including Power Distance, Individualism, and Uncertainty Avoidance. The lower scores on Uncertainty Avoidance and Power Distance for the UK and Ireland, compared to the USA, reflect a preference for flexibility and consensus building in negotiations.

Although both the UK and Ireland are classified as low-context cultures, researchers suggest that they are not as low context as the USA (Hall 1976, Martin 2005). Lewis (2010) noted that the Irish tend to be more low key than Americans and more inclined to seek harmony; Lewis further observed that the English prefer to avoid confrontation, often using understatement and humor in a way that is lost on Americans. These differences may explain why the British/Irish teams view the US negotiation style as aggressive, since their own preference is to avoid confrontation. Similarly, although both the UK and Ireland are classified as monochronic cultures, the UK is viewed as less monochronic than the USA (Hall 1976), while Ireland has been likened more to polychronic southern Europe (Tuleja 2009). Differences in perceptions of time can explain the British/Irish perceptions that Americans tend to rush things. The difference in attitude to time could also help to explain the different approach that Americans take to the negotiation process, preferring to deal with items sequentially whereas the British/Irish teams might prefer a more holistic approach (Gunia et al. 2011).

We may conclude that, although the cultural differences appear to be relatively small and in the case of low/high context not very well defined, they are sufficient to create different expectations and perceptions of communication and negotiation processes. This is useful information for the many US-based multinationals that have invested in Ireland recently. The American Chamber of Commerce in Dublin reported that over 700 US firms had established operations there by 2018, employing over 130,000 people (Holden, 2018). They include hi-tech firms such as Intel, Hewlett Packard, Apple, and Dell; pharmaceutical firms such as Boston Scientific, Medtronic, and Pfizer; and social media firms PayPal, Air BnB, Google and Facebook. In many cases, the Irish subsidiary is integrated closely into the company’s worldwide operations, making the need for clear intercultural communication essential. With the UK having withdrawn from the European Union February 1, 2020, it is likely that more US multinational corporations will move part or all their operations from the UK to Ireland.

The results of this study suggest that there are dangers in grouping cultures together based on similarities in language or in values (e.g., Hofstede 1983; Hofstede et al. 2010; Ronen & Shenkar 1985). While such groupings may be conceptually appealing, they can overlook the subtle differences in speech (accents and dialects) and values that may create barriers to effective communication and different approaches to negotiation. Such groupings may reinforce the false perception that barriers to communication are minimal in cultures that share a common language. Social identity theory suggests that those who have a common linguistic identity share a sense of familiarity and find it easy to create and maintain interpersonal relationships and exchange knowledge (Fredriksson, Barner-Rasmussen & Piekkari 2006), but the results of this study suggest that a common native language is not a panacea for problems in effective cross-cultural communication.

Intercultural communication problems often occur simply because participants are not aware of potential cultural pitfalls or do not perceive that others fail to understand or appreciate their style of communication. In addition, as noted above, cultural differences
can result in different expectations and assumptions among the parties about how the communication and negotiation process should work. This seems to have been the case here since the US team was unaware of the frustrations experienced by the British/Irish team members, or the fact that their British/Irish colleagues viewed them as aggressive and over-demanding.

For decades, international business researchers and practitioners have urged the inclusion of cross-cultural training as part of the curriculum in business schools. Cross-cultural training within organizations, however, is typically reserved for employees who are about to undertake a foreign assignment, even though it is just as relevant for employees who deal on a regular basis with foreign customers, suppliers or partners – and even with co-resident colleagues who are from a different cultural background. The results of this study suggest that cross-cultural training is also appropriate for those employees who interact on a regular basis with customers, suppliers or partners who share a common language, but who are culturally distinct. In the present case, a relatively short (half-day) training program was sufficient to create awareness of the cultural differences as well as the communication and negotiation preferences of all parties to the alliance. The goal of such a training program is not to force one or other party to think or behave like another, but instead to identify areas of similarity and difference so that communication and negotiation can become more effective.

6.2 Limitations of the study and directions for future research

The first limitation concerns the descriptive action-research design, which is not as robust as testing hypotheses derived from the literature with the use of inferential statistics. However, the literature was not clear about the extent of the expected cultural differences between the USA, UK and Ireland. Therefore, the authors opted for a descriptive approach that would help identify the causes of the dysfunctional communication and allow swift remedial action to be taken.

This relates to the second limitation: the generalizability of the findings. Since the participants in the study were not a random sample of a larger population, it might be argued that other factors, such as organizational culture or the personal characteristics of the respondents, biased the responses and that the results cannot be generalized to the wider national populations. Although this is possible, it is unlikely since the respondents represented three separate, autonomous national travel organizations and, although the respondents were not selected at random, they represented the entire population of the three teams involved in the alliance. Furthermore, since the differences in communication and negotiation styles were supported at least in part by the literature on national cultural characteristics, there is no reason to infer that teams in a similar tri-national alliance in a different industry would not experience similar problems.

The third limitation concerns the possibility of social-desirability bias (Grimm 2010): the tendency of research subjects to give socially desirable responses instead of choosing responses that are reflective of their true feelings. It is possible that the US team members did not want to offend their international colleagues due to their perception that doing so might damage relationships within the alliance. Also, since one of the researchers was the immediate supervisor of the US team, it is possible that the US team members provided the answers that they thought he would wish to see. Again, both explanations are possible but unlikely. When their supervisor shared the results of the survey with them, the members of the US team were surprised that their British/Irish colleagues viewed the communication and negotiation processes much more negatively than they did and wanted to know why that was so. They appeared to have had no inkling of the frustration and dissatisfaction experienced by their
British/Irish counterparts. If they had provided socially desirable responses to the survey, it is very unlikely that they would have feigned surprise.

Finally, self-report survey items are open to the possibility of common-method variance (Chang et al. 2010). We sought to minimize this possibility ex ante by reverse scoring several items and by putting the items in random order.

Although sociolinguists recognize that how we speak and the choices that we make in vocabulary, syntax and style reflect our cultural values and norms, there is a paucity of research on the barriers to cross-cultural communication in the workplace within a shared language group. Scott (2000) emphasizes the importance of teaching English-language students the differences in vocabulary between US and British English, especially those variations that can impede communication. Academic research appears to be focused more on differences in pronunciation than on other sociolinguistic differences, so there needs to be more research on other linguistic and non-linguistic differences that can create barriers to communication among native speakers of different varieties of English.

There are also opportunities for further research into differences between many other English-speaking nations, such as between the USA and Canada, as well as across distinct cultural groups within a nation state, such as between the English and Scots in the UK, between West and East Coast Americans, and between Hispanic and Anglo Americans. Furthermore, the need to explore cultural differences within a language group applies to other languages that are geographically widespread or are used as a lingua franca, such as Spanish in Latin America, French in Francophone Africa, and English in south Asia and southern Africa. For differences at the national level, there are sufficient resources to provide a basic understanding of the cultural differences that exist, and this provides researchers with a wealth of opportunities to examine the potential pitfalls in intercultural communication; for differences at the sub-national level, however, there is much basic research yet to be done.

7. Conclusion

Few studies to date have examined intercultural communication between the USA, the UK and the Republic of Ireland. This study seeks to contribute to the literature by suggesting that subtle differences in cultural values may have a greater impact on effective transatlantic communication than hitherto expected.

The international marketing alliance between the three organizations surveyed has been very strong for thirty years; however, there have been a number of communication issues, challenges with product development, and apparent lack of cross-cultural understanding by all three parties. Even though the Americans, Irish and British speak a mostly common language, there is an opportunity to improve the communication of each team’s needs and project initiatives by creating an awareness of cultural differences in communication and negotiation styles. In the initial feedback from the teams in the alliance, many American employees had viewed this as a minor issue; but their counterparts in the UK and Ireland considered it a threat to the alliance.

Therein lies an interesting paradox. The British and Irish consider the US team to be innovative, yet lackadaisical; nimble, but mired in process and committee review; great people, but ineffective at times. The Americans view the British and Irish as too process oriented, but effective in results; energetic, but slow in driving the product being developed. This study demonstrated that cultural and communication differences between Americans on the one hand and British and Irish on the other were present, and that they had an impact on how the three parties communicate with one another.

To paraphrase Shaw, is it correct to say that the British, Irish and Americans are three peoples divided by a common language? It can be argued that they are three peoples who are sometimes confused and distracted by the challenges of different communication styles and
preferences, but not necessarily divided by a common language. Both the British and Irish travel teams value and enjoy the partnership with the US partner, but the introduction of basic cross-cultural training can help to avoid the types of cultural pitfalls that might derail future negotiations between the three partners.

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References


Appendix: Survey instructions

Negotiations and discussion among USA, Britain & Ireland

Introduction - this survey will be used to understand the current state of negotiating, meeting, and working with your partners in the USA. In addition, this survey will ask what consistent items that you notice when working with members of the US travel team. Examples of a potential situation include: discussion of international marketing placements among the three companies and sharing best practices social media marketing through the companies’ preferred social media networks. To gain further insight, we would like to understand what opportunities you see to improve, continue, or stop various negotiating tactics by your American counterparts. The key benefit of this study is to help guide the researchers toward what makes it easier for the three sister companies to work together more effectively and positively in order to drive more incremental revenue to each respective company. All responses will be anonymous.

How long have you been working at your motor club?

< 2 years 2-5 years 5-10 years > 10 years

How long have you worked directly with the American partner club?

< 2 years 2-5 years 5-10 years > 10 years

On a scale on 1 to 5, with 1 being Strongly Disagree and 5 being Strongly Agree, please provide the following insights on working with the American partner:

1 – Strongly Disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neutral 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly Agree

(See Table 1 for the complete survey.)

(Instructions sent to British and Irish teams; the US version was similarly worded.)
The Chinese and American Students and the Trolley Problem: A Cross-cultural Study

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Abstract: People are routinely faced with making decisions. Some decisions are made quickly and easily while others may take reflection and research. Scholars in numerous disciplines such as behavioral economics, marketing, philosophy, psychology, and sociology have attempted to identify the variables that impact people’s ethical/moral choices in the decision-making process. Still, the question of whether people use their heads (rationale) or their hearts (emotions) to make decisions remains unanswered. The present exploratory study hopes to contribute to the discussion on the influence of culture on people’s choices. Working with samples from two cultures (China and USA) and using three variants of the Trolley Problem (Foot 1967), the participants’ responses are used to identify the similarities and differences between their choices. The data suggest that moral decisions are linked to culture. The Chinese participants who are raised in a collectivistic culture seem to have a greater concern for others; the American respondents as products of an individualistic culture are less inclined to interfere in the lives of other people. The data also reveal that gender plays a role in altruistic behavior. Women are more likely to engage in helpful behavior than men. Lastly, the paper discusses the inconsistencies in choices by the respondents.

Keywords: decision making, Trolley Problem, inconsistency of choices, rational choice theory, utilitarianism.

1. Introduction

Although the Trolley Problem was introduced half a century ago, it has constantly drawn attention from scholars in several disciplines and generated hundreds of studies and thousands of citations. Philosophers, psychologists, neuroscientists, and other cognitive scientists have created different versions of the “kill-one-to-save-five” scenarios to understand the way people think about the distinction between killing and letting die. The quantity of literature belonging to “trolleyology” is impressive (Edmonds 2014). The critics of the Trolley Problem argue that it presents an unreal and imaginary situation and produces data of little scientific value. The critics also charge that what people may say in response to the trolley scenario may not be applicable in real life as people say one thing and do something entirely different, or that people will say what they think researchers want to hear. This is an argument that may be levied against all social and behavioral research using surveys, interviews, and focus groups: the frequently used tools in voter behavior, audience research, and consumer behavior.

The Trolley Problem may be a theoretical thought experiment conducted in the safety of a classroom or a laboratory, where no one gets hurt and the choices of the decision-makers (the participants) have no direct costs to them. However, it’s an experiment that generates lively (at times, heated) discussions after the surveys are collected. It’s an experiment that engages the participants and makes them evaluate their personal moral/ethical convictions.

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How close to reality is the situation of sacrificing one to save five? We argue that it is something the policymakers and individuals face frequently. Each political decision that results in redistribution of resources brings benefits to certain groups of citizens whereas certain other groups are economically "punished".

In recent times, the developers and programmers of self-driving automobiles have faced a “trolleyological” moral conundrum. A young mother pushing a baby-carriage suddenly steps in front of the self-driving car. Should the car swerve away from the mother and her baby and into the oncoming traffic, causing a massive multi-vehicle pileup killing and hurting a dozen people and the passenger in the self-driving car, or should the car stay on course and apply the brakes slowly, hitting the mother and her baby carriage? (Goodall 2016, Nyholm & Smids 2016)

In January 2019, the U.S. International Trade Commission (ITC) and Donald Trump had to decide on tariffs on parts and modules needed in the assembly of solar panels. The parts are imported from China. The panels are assembled and used in the U.S. The import of the parts impacted a handful of importers and the manufacturers in China. The tariffs that would result in a higher price of the panels would impact the U.S. solar industry, its workers, and the consumers. The ITC commissioners and Trump were not going to be impacted by the tariff decisions. On one track, there were the Chinese manufacturers and the importers, and on the other track, the American workers and consumers. Trump’s rationale: “China imposes tariffs on U.S. imports, there should be equivalent tariffs on the Chinese imports”. Consequently, the ITC commissioners recommended a tariff. The trolley was diverted to the track where the entire U.S. solar industry was tied to it (Mints 2019).

We contend that the Trolley Problem is neither outdated nor irrelevant in present times; however, our concern is not the choices made by the decision-makers but the variables that may influence people’s responses.

Rational choice theory (Arrow 1963, Savage 1954) assumes that, if an individual prefers red over green apples, they will always choose red apples if both types are available. Similarly, if one believes that action X is more efficient (saves time and money) than action Y, a rational person will always choose X if both courses of action are possible to take to reach a given goal. One is assuming that a rational actor has all the information about the costs and benefits of the two choices. To this classical idea of rationality, Simon (1957, 1972) offered an alternative: the notion of bounded rationality. Simon argued that, since people never have all the information about the costs, benefits, outcomes, and risks of each choice, they frequently fail to make the best decisions.

Kahneman and Tversky (1974, 1996) offering the concepts of heuristics and cognitive biases propose that humans are not rational creatures and make choices that most of the time shun logic. Gigerenzer (2002) warns that there is a major flaw in any system that tries to be overly rational in a highly unpracticable world. Neurobiologist Damasio (1999) notes that people who, due to some cognitive or developmental challenges, are unable to feel emotions are unable to make rational decisions. The implication: experiencing emotions is essential to decision-making. In stark opposition to moral philosophy, neuroscience holds that decision making is not logical but emotional.

We are interested in studying the consistency of choices when there is no reward, and when the recipients are total strangers. Our research aims to contribute to the discussion of the moral choices of the respondents to three scenarios based on the Trolley Problem introduced to the ethical and social science literature by Foot (1967) and elaborated by Thomson (1976, 1985).
2. The Trolley Problem

The Trolley Problem demonstrates the inconsistency of choices. It refers to a hypothetical situation in which one is supposed to be the driver of a trolley with jammed brakes. The trolley is charging down a steep hill with no way to stop it. On the track ahead, the driver sees five workers. At the last moment, the driver sees a spur track to one side and realizes that the trolley can be diverted to it to save the five workers. However, there is one worker repairing the spur track. The moral dilemma pointed by Foot (1967: 10–11) was: Is it morally right for the driver to divert the trolley and kill one worker instead of letting five workers die?

The situation described above was comparable to another, somewhat similar thought experiment, the Organ Transplant, in which five patients are waiting for organs at a hospital. A young man arrives for his annual physical check-up. His organs are a perfect match for the five waiting patients. The participants in the experiment are supposedly extremely gifted and lucky surgeons with a 100% success rate with organ transplants: i.e., no organ that they transplanted was ever rejected by a recipient. In this experiment, the question is whether a surgeon may kill a perfectly healthy person to save five lives (Thomson 1976:205–206, Thomson 1985:1395).

In both cases, the choices are identical: saving several lives at the “cost” of taking one. Yet, the typical reactions of respondents in these two situations are different: whereas the participants are likely to save the five workers in the Trolley case, they are strongly opposed to a similar option in the Organ Transplant scenario (Lanteri, Chelini & Rizzello 2008).

Numerous variations of the problem were coined by Thomson (1976; 1985) who proposed, for instance, to modify the Trolley case by assuming that the decision maker was not the driver but a bystander who could push a lever to divert the trolley from track A to track B. This version that increased the neutrality of the agent was named Bystander at the Switch (Thomson, 1985:1397). Over the years, scholars and theorists such as Singer (2005:339) have come to regard this scenario as the standard Trolley Problem. The choices in this scenario are letting one person die or letting five people die. Some scholars have phrased the alternatives as “killing one” or “letting five die” (Thomson 1976, Steinbock & Norcross 1994).

Another version, the Footbridge Dilemma, moves the decision maker to a footbridge over the trolley track. The runaway trolley is moving towards a group of five people. However, in this case, there is a chance to stop the trolley and save the workers by putting a massive object in the path of the trolley. Conveniently, an excessively overweight person is leaning over the footbridge looking at the trolley. If given a push, the obese person’s body would stop the trolley. As in the previous experiments, the options are to save five lives by sacrificing one or to refrain from acting and let five persons die (Thomson 1976:207–208; 1985: 1409).

There are strong parallels between the Trolley Driver and Bystander at the Switch scenarios; in these two situations, either the driver changes the path of the trolley, or the bystander switches the trolley to a different track by pushing a lever. There is no contact with another human. There are also parallels between the organ transplant and the footbridge quandary. In these two cases, an individual must interact with another human – either by pushing a person to his death or killing a person to perform five transplants.

3. The Study

This article reports on the opinions of two samples: 52 Chinese and 70 American students. The data were collected through a self-administered paper-and-pencil survey. Prior to the survey, a focus group was conducted on the American campus to develop the test items on the instrument used for the data collection. The Chinese sample consisted of the Chinese students attending a university in Poland where all their lectures and coursework were conducted in
The Chinese students had been living in Poland for about one year before the survey was run. The American sample came from a university in Texas. All participants in the two sub-samples were undergraduate students. The data from Chinese students in Poland was collected in June 2017; the data from the American sample was collected in April 2017.

The instrument contained closed-ended items only. However, several of the respondents added their thoughts and comments on the survey forms. Some of these comments are presented in a later section of the paper.

Theoretical debates over the Trolley Problem have focused on explaining why the responses are different or inconsistent. We took a different approach. Instead of making attempts to provide acceptable reasons for such inconsistencies of choices, we focused on identifying the variables that may influence these decisions.

In our study, we used three versions of the Trolley Problem. In our versions, the trolley does not have a driver. Instead, it’s a runaway trolley. We also removed the workers from the tracks and replaced them with helpless individuals tied to the tracks, unable to escape. This adjustment was made to eliminate responses such as: “I would shout at the workers to warn them and make them run away.”

In the first scenario, the trolley is coming to a point where it can either go on track A or track B. On track A, a person is tied to the tracks unable to escape. If the trolley remains moving on track A, this person will be killed. The respondent—the participant in the study—is standing by a lever. By pushing the lever, they can change the trolley’s path from track A to track B and save the person who is tied to the tracks. Since not much of track B is visible and one can’t tell where it leads, we dubbed this version Ill-informed Bystander.

In the second version, we added five people to track B. These five are also tied to the tracks and unable to escape. If the trolley goes on track A, one person will die. If it goes on track B, five will die. The bystander must choose if they direct the trolley to track A and let one person die but save five, or direct it to track B and let five die. The bystander must make a choice: track A or track B. This was our version of Bystander at the Switch.

In the third scenario, the trolley is headed for five people on the tracks. Our respondent is standing on a footbridge, and at the edge of the bridge is an overweight person leaning over to watch the approaching trolley. The respondent can push the obese person over the bridge. The mass of his body will stop the trolley and save the five people. The fall and the impact of the trolley will kill the obese person. Respondents are told that they may not opt to throw themselves in front of the trolley as their body mass will not stop the trolley. This is essentially Thomson’s (1976) Fat Man scenario.

Instead of verbal descriptions of the scenarios, we used drawings. Respondents were shown the first sketch (Ill-informed Bystander): one person tied to the track, and an empty track. Respondents were asked to record their response. Then, they were shown the second sketch where the trolley could be directed to tracks A or B with the outcome of saving five people at the cost of one or saving one and letting five be killed: i.e., Bystander at the Switch.

Respondents were asked to write their response. Finally, they were shown the third sketch, the Footbridge Dilemma that required pushing a person off the bridge and into the path of the trolley. While respondents recorded their response, they were neither allowed to go back and change their responses nor discuss the scenarios with other participants. Once the responses were turned in, participants were allowed to discuss the three scenarios.

4. The sample

The variables for the study were culture (individualist vs. collectivist), gender, and relational status: i.e., whether single or in relationship. Our rationale for choosing these two cultures was based on the difference in scores on the Individualism-Collectivism dimension (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov 2010) where, on a 100-point scale, the U.S. scores 91 points and China
Our intention is not to stereotype the 327 million Americans or 1.3 billion Chinese people as a homogenous group; however, the fact remains that, traditionally, Chinese culture has valued collectivism whereas American culture has valued individualism and self-reliance. We are fully aware that the Chinese culture is moving away from being a socialist to a capitalist system. At the same time, we realize that, with talk of free education and free healthcare for all, American society is moving away from being a purely capitalistic system toward social democracy. Even though Hofstede and colleagues’ research results are highly controversial and not without their critics, common sense seems to dictate that Chinese culture, for the most part, is collectivist — at least more so than American culture.

Parents in almost all cultures raise boys and girls differently: not only in dressing them in boy and girl colors but also in the toys they give their boys and girls and the types of games they encourage them to play. The difference in treatment continues into the schools, universities, and workplace. Women are expected to play different kinds of roles than men and are expected to behave according to different sets of standards. Women’s use of language differs from that of men; the emotion-display rules are different for men than for women. In most male-female relationships, the balance of power is tipped in favor of men. It is reasonable to stay that the worldview of women is different from that of men. Thus, it’s reasonable to expect that the differences in the socialization of men and women may affect their decision-making.

We chose relational status as a variable to explore if being in a relationship or having a family might influence a person’s attitude towards saving a life.

Assuming that culture, gender, and relational status may affect decision-making, we tested the following three hypotheses:

1. Culture has an impact on decision-making.
2. Gender has an impact on decision-making.
3. Relational status has an impact on decision-making.

The participants (N=122) were university students from the USA and China. The two samples consisted of 57 men and 65 women; 75 respondents were single, and 47 were in relationships. Since the data were of nominal and ordinal nature, Chi-square statistics were employed to make comparisons among and within the subsamples (Savage 1954, Moore 2010).

5. Data and results

As expected, in the case of the Ill-informed Bystander, most participants (79%) from both countries said they would push the lever to save a person’s life. See Table 1.

Table 1: Will you save a person’s life?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>45 (64.3%)</td>
<td>25 (35.7%)</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>43 (83%)</td>
<td>9 (17%)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi square = 36.089; the difference is significant at p < .01.

As noted, the U.S. scores 91 on the Individualism-Collectivism dimension (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov 2010), while China scores 20. This may explain why a large portion (34%) of the U.S. students choose not to interfere with another person’s fate, the assumed thinking being: it’s none of my business. China has a long tradition of being a collectivist culture, which may explain the greater level of concern for the well-being of a stranger. In regards to our first hypothesis, we may state that the individualism-collectivism dimension of culture affects decision-making. The Chinese respondents reported being more willing to help a person than the Americans did.
At this point, it is important to note that Hofstede and colleagues (2010) collected their initial data in the 1970s and '80s. In the past four decades, the United States has shifted closer to social democracy while China has embraced private ownership and some of the ideas that were strictly associated with capitalism and the market economy. We argue that, over the years, American culture has moved toward the collectivist end of the continuum while the Chinese culture has aligned more closely with individualist ideas. This is not to declare that the Chinese have abandoned their collectivist ideals or that the Americans have abandoned their individualism. It is likely that the differential of 71 points between China and the U.S. as was calculated in the '70s may have shrunk.

An alternative explanation, however, may be that Americans are less willing to act if the outcome of their action is uncertain (track B is not visible). In fact, in the second scenario (see below), their willingness to act was much higher.

When respondents from both cultures expressed an unwillingness to act to save a life when no apparent costs were involved, we felt that other variables might be at work. We analyzed the data on two variables: gender and relational status (see tables 2 and 3).

Table 2: Gender: will you save a person’s life? Response: no.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Differential</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
<td>9.3 p.p.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>8.9 p.p.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The differences are not statistically significant.

Table 3: Relational status: will you save a person’s life? Response: no. Single people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi square = 3.1856; the difference is significant at \( p < .10 \).

For single people, the data showed that a slightly higher percentage of the Chinese sample said they would act to save a person. The difference is statistically significant at \( p < .10 \).

The overall comparison between the US and China samples did not reveal any significant differences in the variable relational status. However, among the American sample, those in relationships were slightly more inclined to save a stranger than single American students. There is partial support for the third hypothesis.

In making a choice between saving five people versus one in the second scenario, Bystander at the Switch, 110 persons (90%) said they would divert the trolley to the spur with one person to save the five tied to the main track. See Table 4.

Table 4: Will you save one life to save five?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>62 (88.6%)</td>
<td>8 (11.4%)</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>48 (92.3%)</td>
<td>12 (7.7%)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>110 (90.2%)</td>
<td>12 (9.8%)</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No statistically significant difference between the American and Chinese samples was found.

In both cultures, a clear majority of respondents were willing to sacrifice one for the benefit of many: i.e., the utilitarian approach. In the case of the American sample, single respondents were more inclined to save five lives at the cost of one than respondents who were in relationships. The difference was significant at \( p < .05 \). Regarding gender, there were no differences between or among the two samples.

In the case of the Footbridge Dilemma – as reported in several previous studies – fewer respondents said they would push the man over to save five than in Bystander at the Switch.
Only 56 respondents (46%) said they would push the man over to stop the trolley and save the people on the track. The data are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Will you push the fat man over to save five lives?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>43 (61.4%)</td>
<td>27 (38.6%)</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>13 (25%)</td>
<td>39 (75%)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>56 (46%)</td>
<td>66 (54%)</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi square = 15.945; the difference is significant at \( p < .001 \).

Only 25% of Chinese respondents said they would push the person over to save five lives while 61.4% of American respondents said they would. This difference is significant.

There is no significant difference between the U.S. and Chinese samples based on gender or relational status. A previous study of Hispanic American students (Rehman & Dzionek-Kozłowska 2018) reported a difference of choices in the Footbridge scenario for single and in-relationship respondents. Single people were less likely to push the man over. However, our present data showed no such differences between the choices made by single students and those in relationships.

6. Discussion

In the second scenario, the choice was either to sacrifice one person to save five or save one and let five die. We assumed that most respondents would feel that the logical thing to do was to save five lives at the cost of one. Ninety percent of respondents used this rationale and said they would save five lives. It seemed the rational choice.

Responses to the Footbridge Dilemma have baffled psychologists and philosophers since the introduction of the Trolley Problem (Green et al. 2001). While most heart surgeons would not hesitate to perform a heart transplant if they knew that the donor was already dead and the procedure might give new life to the recipient, not many will agree to take the life of a healthy person to save five as in the Transplant Experiment. The decision to change the path of the trolley to save five people is a judgment based on logic and reason. To push a person to his death or to take the life of a healthy person becomes, for most people, a moral issue. Emotions, rather than reason, guide such moral decisions. Pushing a person in front of the trolley may be the rational thing to do, but most people would side with their emotions and act irrationally.

There is an academic difference between Bystander at the Switch and the Footbridge Dilemma. In case of the bystander, respondents were required to act: direct the trolley to track A or track B. In the Footbridge Dilemma, they might act: i.e., push the person over, or not act and let five people die. Even though the consequences of switching the trolley to track A and pushing the person are the same, the conditions are not. Only the utilitarian logic dictates that just as one should switch the trolley to save five lives, one should also act accordingly on the footbridge to save five lives. We do realize that the two scenarios are not exactly alike.

Some of the responses by participants shed light on how people rationalize their behavior:

- One of the students who chose not to do anything to save one person, in the first scenario, wrote: “it’s not my responsibility”.
- Another respondent commented: “I will not interfere with nature”.
- One respondent explaining his decision, in the second scenario, said: “it’s not for me to decide who lives and who dies”.
• In the case of the Footbridge Dilemma, several students (Chinese and American) wrote, “I cannot play God”. One participant justified his non-action by saying, “I will not push the man. It’s murder. It’s against the law”.

Mathematically, the outcomes in Bystander at the Switch and the Footbridge Dilemma are the same: sacrifice one person to save five. If that is the rational thing to do in Bystander at the Switch, the choices should be similar in the Footbridge Dilemma. The rational thing to do should be to save the five lives by pushing the obese person over. However, in the Footbridge scenario, more respondents are driven by their moral convictions rather than logic or reason. Table 6 presents the inconsistency in people’s decision making. Two important observations may be made.

First, the percentages are lower in every category for the Footbridge Dilemma. Second, in all the five categories, the differentials are noticeably higher for the Chinese sample than the American.

Second, the differentials based on gender are not significant for respondents from either culture. The three highest differentials are in the Chinese sample.

Table 6: Inconsistency in decision making.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Push the lever to save five lives</th>
<th>Push a person to save five lives</th>
<th>Inconsistency in decisions (in percentage points)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>American sample</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>88.57%</td>
<td>61.42%</td>
<td>27.15 p.p.*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>90.24%</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
<td>20.7 p.p.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singles</td>
<td>95.6%</td>
<td>64.4%</td>
<td>31.2 p.p.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In relationship</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>20 p.p.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chinese sample</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>96.43%</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
<td>67.86 p.p.*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>92.3%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>67.3 p.p.*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singles</td>
<td>96.67%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>76.67 p.p. *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In relationship</td>
<td>86.36%</td>
<td>31.82%</td>
<td>54.54 p.p.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant at $p < .01$.

The lowest differentials are in the American sample. Chi-square tabulation reveals that the differential for the overall American sample is significant at $p < .01$. (chi square = 13.75).

Chi-square tabulations also reveal:

- The differential for the overall Chinese sample is significant at $p < .01$ (chi square = 48.57).
- The differential for Chinese men is significant at $p < .01$. (chi square = 27.51).
- The differential for Chinese singles is significant at $p < .01$ (chi square = 36.27).

This does not imply that the Americans are indifferent to the well-being of others, or that they are more rational or consistent in their behavior than their Chinese counterparts. It simply suggests that Chinese culture, being more collectivist than American culture, may prompt different emotional reactions. American culture, being individualist, may drive people to be more self-centered and self-absorbed.

7. Conclusions

In our study, we tried to control for several variables that may influence respondents’ choices. By selecting a homogenous sample of college-age students, we controlled for variations in age and cultural diversity. By employing hypothetical scenarios that remove genetic
relationships, we also controlled for the bias that might occur if subjects were to help their genetically connected relatives. The importance of such links has been demonstrated by, among others, Bleske-Rechek and colleagues (2010). We have tried to create a situation where the beneficiaries are unknown to the benefactors, and the anticipated return for the effort is nonexistent.

Our research confirms previous findings that people’s choices are not fully consistent. The differences in the responses between the second and the third of our scenarios -- i.e., Bystander at the Switch and the Footbridge Dilemma – demonstrate that respondents are reluctant to act if required to be emotionally engaged in the process of decision-making with visible costs for the alternatives (see, e.g., Greene et al. 2001).

Given the limitation of the study due to sample size, we refrain from making any generalizations. We noted that females were slightly more willing to act than males, although the differences were relatively small. Our data do not allow us to identify any (statistically significant) difference between the choices made by single and non-single respondents.

It is evident that, when personal involvement and emotions are separated from a situation, people can make use of logic, reason, and rationale. Once moral convictions become involved (even when the logical outcomes are the same), people’s choices become inconsistent.

Further research is needed with larger samples and different cultures. Our sample consisted of university students. We believe that samples with greater diversity in age and duration of relationship may shed light on decision-making. How many children one has and how old they are may also be variables worth considering. It may be useful to study the responses made by individuals pursuing different career paths. Bourget and Chalmers (2014) found that professional philosophers are much more reluctant to act not only in the Footbridge Dilemma but also in Bystander at the Switch: no more than 68.2% of participants in their study declared they would change the trolley’s route to save the five lives. Examining the reactions of philosophy students who have been exposed to Kantian ideas and consequentialism might reveal the indoctrination effect of philosophical studies. Similarly, studying the responses of economics students, with training in utility maximization, may explain why people pursuing different career paths may respond differently to the same stimulus.

Scenarios such as justifying drone strikes and killing dozens of civilians to eliminate one terrorist leader or taking a stand to oppose abortion and reinstate capital punishment seem to suggest that the trolley industry is in vigorous health. Recent developments in cognitive sciences and practical philosophy assure us that even though the imaginative variations of the Trolley Problem may not bear much resemblance to reality, it helps us explore the nature of morality and continues to be a useful tool for coping with ethics and rationality.

About the authors
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**References**


Selling Spain: Tourism, Tensions, and Islam in Iberia

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Abstract: Spain’s relationship with Islam is both phobic and -philic, attitudes revealed in policy and practice throughout the country. This paper examines the ways in which Spain’s unique multicultural, multi-religious past affects the nation’s present, specifically with regard to tourism. The aim is to situate Spanish concerns amongst the broader context of cultural tourism by exposing how Spain’s history is concurrently sold to Muslims and non-Muslims and providing insight into how the representation of this history reflects (or rejects) the nation’s current circumstances. Although Spain's tourist industry often capitalizes on Iberia’s Islamic past, marketing the peninsula as a leading destination for both “halal tourism” and for those seeking glimpses of medieval al-Andalus, Christian-Muslim tensions continue to plague the nation as controversies, prejudice, and violence abound.

Keywords: Spanish tourism, halal tourism, al-Andalus, Islamophobia, Islamophilia.

1. Introduction

“Spain is different.” …But not too different. While the Franco-era slogan intended to capitalize on Spain’s reputation as a land of mystery and intrigue – the threshold to Northern Africa and to the cultures of the exotic East – the tourist industry simultaneously strove to present a modern, developed nation that was assuredly European. Today Spain struggles with these same competing tensions to be both different from and like the rest of Europe, specifically with regard to Islam. At once proud of and threatened by its Moorish past, efforts to market the spaces and traditions inherited from medieval al-Andalus exist alongside policies, practices, and media portrayals that reveal an underlying Islamophobia and belie the celebratory discourse of the tourism industry. This paper will examine Spain’s ambivalent relationship with Islam, aiming to situate Spanish concerns amongst the broader context of cultural tourism by exposing the ways in which the nation and its history are sold to both Muslim and non-Muslim tourists and by providing insight into how the representation of this history reflects (or rejects) the realities of contemporary convivencia.2

A variety of methods including review of promotional materials (tourism brochures, videos, websites), social media, newspapers, and scholarly publications, along with on-site observations and secondary data analysis, were employed to identify issues related to Spain's Muslim community and Islamic identity, and the promotion of such identity to tourists. This study contributes to the existing literature on cultural tourism, filling the gap regarding such tourism in Spain by exposing the dilemma within which the Spanish tourist industry is caught: namely, pitching a history whose descendants are scorned by much of contemporary society.

The paper will begin by considering similar cases of discord between the romantic representations and the realities of minority populations elsewhere, followed by a discussion of the portrayal of Islam and Muslims in Spanish media and a comprehensive examination of the evolution and efforts of the Spanish tourist industry, including Spain’s engagement with a new subset of the industry known as halal tourism. The paper will conclude by

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2 Convivencia is a Spanish term without an exact English equivalent, most often translated as “coexistence” yet implying a harmonious relationship between involved parties.
contextualizing the controversies and contradictions exposed in the previous sections by situating the tourist enterprise amidst more extensive tensions surrounding Islam in Spain.

2. Comparative cases

Ethnic tourism, defined by Yang (2011: 312) as such activities as visiting indigenous villages or ethnic theme parks, attending cultural festivals or events, watching folk dances or traditional ceremonies, or simply shopping for indigenous crafts and souvenirs, is increasingly popular as tourists seek out diversity and the tourist industry looks for ways to distinguish locales. The same is true of the more inclusive category of cultural tourism. Yet there often exists a marked incongruity as efforts and areas that seemingly celebrate diversity contradict the discrimination experienced by the minority communities featured by such tourism.

Numerous scholars have studied cultural tourism around the globe and raised abounding concerns regarding authenticity, commodification, distortion, voyeurism, and the appropriation of cultural meaning that often accompany such tourism (Oakes 1992, Smith 2001, Wall & Xie 2005). For instance, Kelly-Holmes and Pietikäinen (2014) discuss the commodification of the Sámi culture in the transnational Sáamiland (covering territory in Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Russia); Boukris (2017) critically analyzes racial tensions in France through the Black Paris project; and Shaw et al. (2004) examine the challenges and conflicts associated with the development of two districts in east London – Brick Lane as “Banglatown” and Green Street as a multicultural quarter – and reference other European examples such as the district of Kreuzberg in Berlin, home to migrants from Turkey and Yugoslavia after the wall was erected in 1961 and since featured in guidebooks as a “bohemian” neighborhood of the German capital. Researchers note issues of reductionism, stereotyping, exoticization, deculturation, and dehumanization in these and other cases.

Various scholars have also studied the increased interest in Jewish history and culture since the collapse of communism in central and eastern Europe, often accompanied by resurgent anti-Semitism (Corsale 2017, Dean 2004, Wiesel et al. 2004). Of further concern in these areas is the fact that the consequent Jewish-themed festivals, exhibitions, souvenir shops, restaurants, museums, and memorials are most often produced and managed by non-Jews, thus denying Jewish communities a central role in the management and promotion of their own heritage. Cities such as Prague, Budapest, and Cracow highlight their multicultural past to present a narrative of tolerance and cultural vigor, yet such promotion by the tourist industry without the participation of Jews themselves underscores issues of illegitimacy, misrepresentation, and exploitation (Corsale 2017). This lack of agency of the minority groups on display is yet another common theme in cultural tourism.

Beyond Europe, Yang (2011) has written of the views and concerns of the Han Chinese with regard to their representation and employment at the Yunnan Ethnic Folk Villages in Kunming, China; Attanapola and Lund (2013) have studied the situation of the Veddas in Sri Lanka; Koot (2016) discusses tourism centered upon the indigenous South Kalahari Bushmen in South Africa; and Bott (2018) has researched ethnic tourism in northern Vietnam, where minority indigenous groups are represented in ways that reproduce race and gender tropes and where such tourism has served to further marginalize minority women. This is also the case in many areas of Latin America, where scholars have long studied ethnic tourism in relation to the countless indigenous cultures of the region. For instance, Theodossopoulos (2012) has investigated the exoticization of the Emberá in Panama; Craven (2016) has written of the refusal of the Nazaret community to be toured in the Colombian Amazon; Vargas (2018) has considered tourism’s effect on the indigenous Mayans in Palenque, Mexico; de la Maza (2018) has analyzed tourism in multiple indigenous territories in Chile; and Wierucka (2018) has examined the relationship between tourism and the Huaorani tribe in Ecuador.
Elsewhere in the Americas, researchers have looked at the ubiquitous Chinatowns (such as Anderson's [1995] study of Vancouver’s "Little Orient") and the manifold problems related to American Indian tourism, among which privacy is a leading concern. Harkin (2003) notes the irony of the fact that those cultures most protective of personal privacy attract the largest numbers of tourists. As with other cases of cultural tourism, Harkin also discusses concerns of authenticity, suggesting that the Mashantucket Pequot Museum in New England typifies Baudrillard’s hyperreality as a simulacrum of former times that – from the tourist perspective – is superior to the original (2003:581). The quest for authenticity has become a driving force of tourism (Hall and Page 2009, Harkin 2003, Mitchell & Murphy 1991), yet ironically the desire for the authentic has resulted in the (necessary) production of the staged: “since the object of the tourist’s quest is in fact the lifeway itself, with nothing left out, it is imperative that the tourist encounters be staged. Otherwise, tribal people run the risk of entirely losing their privacy and ultimately, their lifeways themselves” (Harkin 2003:578). Inauthenticity has thus become a mechanism to protect both privacy and practices.

Even with the pervasiveness of contrived culture though, lost identity and “forced” assimilation are common concerns of cultural tourism. Although many governments ostensibly encourage cultural pluralism, and the tourist industry promotes cultural tourism as a manifestation thereof, oftentimes there is a resultant social push toward integration, and individuals are unwillingly assimilated into the mainstream (Schnell 2003). Conversely, some minority groups experience deepening alienation as they are expected to service visitors and must act a part to fulfill preconceived notions of themselves (Shaw & MacLeod 2000). Exacerbated isolation and reduced self-esteem are thus additional corollaries when culture is packaged for tourist consumption. A case in point is that of Spanish Muslims in the Andalusian city of Granada, who have been driven to the remote Polígono neighborhood, devoid of resources and under constant surveillance by local authorities (Rogozen-Soltar 2017). Such geographic and social marginalization has been the case for Muslims throughout Spain, who epitomize the disparity between the idealized representations and the harsh conditions regularly experienced by minorities around the world. This dissonance is most conspicuous in the media, where both Muslims and Islam are under constant attack. As the public's most extensive and persistent encounter with cultural difference is often through mass communication, an examination of Spanish media portrayals will thus initiate the analysis of Islam in Spain.

3. Media representation

The perception of Islam in Spain has been studied extensively (de Bunes Ibarra 1989, Perceval 1997), along with the conflation of the Moors of al-Andalus and contemporary Muslims (Boll 2018, Calderwood 2014, Zapata-Barrero & De Witte 2010), and the experience of Muslims living in Spain today (Planet Contreras 2018, Rogozen-Soltar 2017, Rosón 2016). The focus has overwhelmingly been on historical tensions and residual biases: attitudes manifested in Spanish media. Driven by public impressions of peoples and places, tourism has an intimate, interdependent relationship with the media (Crouch, Jackson & Thompson 2005; Månsson 2011; Stepchenkovas & Eales 2011). It is surprising, then, that Spain’s tourist industry tends to celebrate its Moorish past despite the media’s exceedingly negative portrayal of both Islam and Muslims.

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3 Crouch, Jackson, and Thompson (2005: 2) term the bridge between tourism and the media the “tourist imagination”, defined as “the imaginative investment involved in the crossing of certain virtual boundaries within the media or actual boundaries within the physical process of tourism”. While the overlap between the two industries is often examined in terms of the images presented of the tourist destinations themselves, in the present article the focus is the perception of the peoples, cultures, and religion behind the spaces. The interdependence nonetheless remains.
Numerous studies and scholars (Afshar 2013, Marranci 2004, Peña-Ramos & Medina 2011) have examined Islamophobia expressed in European media, and in Spanish media in particular (Beck 2012, Fundación 2010, Observatorio 2017). Such media often employ a series of stereotypes in their representations of Islam, characterizing the religion and its followers as irrational, inferior, aggressive, intolerant, and monolithic. Muslims are recurrently portrayed as the antithetical “other”, the attention given to Muslims in Europe with a concurrent failure to recognize Muslims from Europe (Marranci 2004). In this way, the media tends to overlook Islam’s scientific and humanistic contributions to European society (Vernet 2006): what Medina-Bravo, Rodrigo-Alsina, and Guerrero-Solé (2018) refer to as “historical amnesia” regarding Islam’s significant role in shaping modern Europe.

Medina-Bravo, Rodrigo-Alsina, and Guerrero-Solé (2018) note that the Spanish public often fails to recognize its own prejudice and widely accepts the Islamophobic discourse presented by the media. This Islamophobic discourse both reflects and incites societal opinions, affecting individuals’ actions and public policy alike. Nonetheless, there exists a fascination with Spain’s Islamic past, a fascination upon which the tourist industry has recently begun to depend (Calderwood 2004, Rogozen-Soltar 2017, Ruggles 2011: 34, Tremlett 2008). Andalusia, Iberia’s southernmost autonomous community that continues to exhibit the most Moorish influence, has become a top destination much for this reason. Yet this remote region wasn’t always as popular with tourists, especially those sites distant from the Mediterranean coast.4 As recounted below, Spain’s tourism sector has evolved notably in recent decades to not only recognize but revere the cultural heritage whose contemporary representatives are so often denigrated in today’s media coverage.

4. Spanish tourism

Spain is currently the world’s second most popular tourist destination: a stark contrast from its marginal status when European tourism developed in the Eighteenth Century.5 Officially engendered in 1905 when King Alfonso XIII created the National Commission for the Promotion of Tourism, the Spanish tourist industry has long been a centralized, state-guided entity operated for multiple objectives. During the Franco dictatorship, tourism became a means both to boost the economy and improve foreign relations after the Spanish Civil War. To that end, and to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the regime, Minister of Information and Tourism Manual Fraga Iribarne introduced the now-famous slogan “Spain is different” in 1964. Drawing on the notion that had been circulating since the late Eighteenth Century that Spain was unique, exotic – anachronistic even – the government officially branded an international identity that would persist for decades. Images of festivals, folklore, and flamenco presented an eccentric yet accessible locale to which Europeans could quickly and affordably escape. Yet this image presupposed a national homogeneity, hinging upon a denial of internal difference: what Afinoguénova and Martí-Olivella (2008: xii) call “unified theme-park ‘difference’”. Spain was different from the rest of Europe, but Spaniards were presented as alike, as regional, political, cultural, and linguistic distinctions were intentionally omitted.

4 For instance, London’s 1951 Sunday Times identified Andalusia as only for those travelers with time and money (Barke & Towner 1996: 18).
5 In 2017, 82 million visitors travelled to Spain, breaking records for the fifth consecutive year. Tourism in Spain presently accounts for 11% of the economy (Asenjo Domínguez 2018), increasing by 12% in 2017 alone (Agence 2018). Numbers are expected to continue to rise in coming years as Spain remains a trendy destination for international travel. The Andalusian city of Seville was recently named the “best city in the world to visit” in the popular Lonely Planet Best in Travel 2018 publication, marking the first time a Spanish city topped the list (Schmalbruch 2017).
After Franco’s death in 1975, the tourist industry expressly determined to reverse the image of a backward nation that was distinct from the rest of Europe; but there were multiple irregularities and difficulties regarding the development of this sector during the first post-Franco years (González and Moral 1996, Maiztegui-Oñate & Bertolini 1996). The Spanish sun took center stage in the 1970s and ’80s; but by the ’90s, there arose a crisis of the coastal tourism model and a need for differentiation (Afinoguénova & Martí-Olivella 2008: xxii). As Spain’s shores became insufficient, the result was new marketing strategies that portrayed Spain as a destination with more to offer than just a budget beach vacation. Through rural and urban tourism campaigns in particular, the industry shifted the focus away from the coastline to the nation’s interior and began to tout – for the first time – Spain’s internal diversity and (multi-)cultural heritage.

This approach continues today, a primary emphasis of which is the peninsula’s medieval Islamic past. Much like the Orientalist fascination of Eighteenth-Century Romantics, contemporary travelers explicitly seek out Moorish Spain, and the industry has begun to capitalize on this interest. The travel agency Al-Andalus Experience (https://alandalus-experience.com/) promises to help travelers “discover the secrets of Muslim Spain” for instance, while the official tourism portal of Andalusia (https://www.andalucia.org/en/home) offers a number of cultural routes within the category of “Routes of the Heritage of Al-Andalus”. The Legacy of al-Andalus, a public foundation of the Andalusian regional government that aims to educate on and support the cultural patrimony of region, also promotes a series of cultural routes that showcase the Muslim period. The art and architecture from al-Andalus have become iconic of the entire country, featured on websites, brochures, signage, and menus. Today Spain’s most visited site is the Alhambra palace in Granada, former residence of the Andalusi sultans and representative of the glories of Muslim Spain. The remnants of al-Andalus not only draw those interested in what is perceived as Spain’s exotic past, however; these locales have also become top stops for halal tourism, a relatively new subset of the tourist industry specifically aimed at the increasingly influential body of Muslim travelers.

5. Halal tourism

Halal tourism markets services and activities compatible with Islamic tenets and practices, with such offerings as hotels with separate pools for men and women, restaurants that prepare halal-certified food, facilities that don’t serve alcohol, and itineraries related to Islamic culture. Spain has recognized the economic potential of this market and begun to engage with this sector of late. Drawing upon its Muslim heritage – and despite the ubiquity of pork products and alcohol – the country has become a leading destination for halal tourism. According to the Global Muslim Travel Index 2018 published by CrescentRating, the foremost authority on halal-friendly travel, Spain ranked #2 on the list of Muslim inbound destinations for non-OIC (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation) countries and #8 overall in terms of having an environment that supports Muslim travelers (CrescentRating 2018).

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6 Calderwood (2014:41) criticizes The Legacy of al-Andalus foundation for failing to truly engage with Spain’s Muslim community, and argues that the cultural routes suggest that visitors can “inhabit the subjectivity” of Andalusi Muslims.

7 Not all tourism efforts in recent years have sought to draw attention to Muslim Spain; the Mezquita in Córdoba is a prime example. In 1998 the Catholic Church, which administers the site, changed the name from “Mosque-Cathedral” (familiarly known simply as the Mezquita, or “Mosque”) to the “Cathedral (former Mosque)”; in 2010 this awkward designation was reduced to “Córdoba Cathedral.” After years of public protests, though, the Church conceded and announced in 2016 that it will revert to “Mosque-Cathedral”. See Altares (2015) and Boll (2017) for more regarding the controversies surrounding the Mezquita’s administration and operations.

8 The Global Muslim Travel Index 2018 estimates that Muslim visitors’ spending will reach $220 billion by 2020, with 156 million visitor arrivals globally (CrescentRating 2018).
Halaltrip, the largest halal and Muslim-focused travel platform, named Spain – Andalusia in particular – the top destination for Islamic heritage in 2016. It lists the Andalusian city of Granada second on their list of “10 Destinations Every Muslim Globetrotter Must Visit in 2017” and included Barcelona as one of the “9 Best Muslim-Friendly City Breaks in Europe for 2018” (Noohu 2017). The London-based company Islamic Travels (http://islamictravels.com/) spotlights “Spain: 8 Centuries of Islamic Heritage” as one of the feature tour on its website, while Visit Al Andalus tours (http://visit-alandalus.com/), a travel agency based in Granada, organizes halal tours exclusively in Spain, Portugal, and Morocco.

Although the same product – Islamic Spain – is explicitly marketed to Muslim and non-Muslim visitors, it is nonetheless done so differently. A telling example of this disparity is the official tourism portal of Spain, https://www.spain.info. Of the 30 different versions of the portal, only three – the English and Arabic versions for citizens from countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) alliance (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman), along with the version in Persian – differ in terms of images and information. The phrase “Come to Spain, and smile” headlines the home page of these three versions – a phrase imposed upon the central image of a (curiously) fair-skinned couple holding a map. An interesting omission here is a link to the “Spain is Culture” portal that is found on the other versions.

A site maintained by the Ministry of Culture and Sport, the “Spain is Culture” portal (http://www.spainisculture.com) “promotes and disseminates the cultures of Spain”. Declaring itself as “a web site with the best of [Spain’s] cultural heritage”, it is noteworthy that the site is not directly presented to a population from which that very heritage is largely derived.

Although markedly excluded from the other versions of the site, “Halal tourism” is one of the six main tabs on the three variants mentioned above. Featuring a photograph of tiles in the Alhambra Palace in Granada, the “Halal tourism” page (https://www.spain.info/gcc/en/halal) directly addresses Muslim travelers and proclaims the country to be “a good halal destination for your holidays”, one that “takes your needs into account and makes you feel comfortable during your holidays”. The page continues, “Spain is a country that accommodates all religions” and later points out that many of the dishes are “based on Arab cuisine”. Sections of the page list halal restaurants and hotels, religious services in airports, official mosques throughout the country (more than 250), and religious celebrations, and links are included to various other websites including the Union of Islamic Communities in Spain, the Spanish Federation of Islamic Religious Entities, and Arab House: an organization founded in 2006 that serves to connect Spain to the Arab world through seminars, conferences, workshops, publications, films, exhibitions, and other cultural activities.

In April of 2018, the Andalusian tourism board released a video titled “Andalusia your roots, your destination: Halal Tourism” (Vive 2018). Set to music that is distinctly Middle Eastern and highlighting images of top sites that date from al-Andalus, the video is worthy of note because it ostensibly blurs the host/guest, home/away, self/other polarities traditionally determined by travel. Here the spaces visited are, in fact, the ancestral home to the guests, and this spatial legacy is the very emphasis of the travel itinerary. Halal tourism in Spain calls for

9 For an in-depth analysis of the language and design of the international versions of the site during the “I need Spain” campaign, see Helfrich(2018).
10 Helfrich (2018: 76) notes that Spain’s visual branding is intimately connected to the tourist experience, a “promise to be fulfilled once the potential tourist enters the country”. She points out that the implied consumer is always visually present in the advertising for Spain, yet here the image of the consumer presented is strikingly different from typical halal consumer targeted by the site. While Turespaña (the government institution that has directed the marketing of Spain in the global arena since 1928) has long aimed to foreground the tourist perspective in its marketing, here they seemed to have missed the mark – either intentionally or not.
a Derridian deconstruction of the dichotomies of travel; yet with emphases on “roots”, “legends”, and “legacy” the video firmly establishes Islamic Spain as bygone. Muslim travelers are invited to “experience” and to “feel” Andalusia – verbs that necessarily imply temporality. Andalusia is a “destination” – a noun that again reinforces the status of outsider – decidedly not “home”.

In October 2016, the same organization published a video titled “Andalucía your roots, your destination: Sephard Tourism” (Vive 2016). Virtually the same language is used here to invite Jews to travel to Andalusia, with the same relegation of Jewish Spain to the distant past. The script proclaims: “Andalucía is the ancestral home of one of the largest Jewish communities in the world. Here are your homes… [your] prayer spaces. We feel close here to your words, celebrities, place names, names, monuments, songs, cuisine, urban design, traditions, legends….” Although similar in tone, the words “home” and “prayer” are employed here but notably absent from the Halal Tourism video – not even the words “Islam” or “Muslim” are mentioned explicitly in the first video. In the public eye, Jews are undoubtedly less threatening today than Muslims, both for the virtual absence of a Jewish community in contemporary Spanish society and for the (erroneous) automatic association of Islam with terrorism. While still treated as a temporary guest to Spain – the video clearly establishes an us/them dichotomy (“We invite you to experience…” [italics added]) – the Jewish visitor is kept less at arm’s length than the Muslim visitor.

Nonetheless, attempts to use the supposed convivencia of centuries past to attract Jewish tourists in many ways parallel the efforts of halal tourism campaigns. Flesler and Pérez Melgosa have examined this appropriation of Spain’s Jewish past by the tourist industry, a strategy they read as fruitful both economically and “as a way to justify caring for a heritage connected to those parts of Spanish culture which had been banned, censored, and persecuted” (2008:65). Yet the assuagement of historical guilt is exposed as a subordinate outcome by the repeated justification that the Jewish network enterprise (the Red de Juderías) is fundamentally driven by economic motives, underscoring the continued dissociation from and malaise with regard to Spain’s Sephardic heritage. Unlike the video on Sephardic tourism, though, Flesler and Pérez Melgosa (2008) note that the so-called Centers of Interpretation (Centros de Interpretación) instituted throughout Spain cater to a Gentile rather than a Jewish audience, educating on the basics of Judaism instead of serving as sites that explore and expose the nation’s Sephardic legacy. Halal tourism by its very definition caters to the Muslim visitor, yet both the industry at large and mainstream Spanish society clearly consider that visitor extraneous to modern Spain. This attitude reflects underlying, centuries-old tensions pertaining to Islam that continue to plague the nation.

6. The bigger picture

The ambivalence with which Muslims are treated by the tourist industry is symptomatic of broader issues in Spain. Juxtaposed with heightened interest in the nation’s Islamic history is increasing Islamophobia. According to the Demographic Study of the Muslim Community (Estudio Demográfico de la Comunidad Musulmana) published by the Union of Islamic Communities of Spain (Unión de Comunidades Islámicas de España, UCIDE), there are more than 1.9 million Muslim citizens in Spain, primarily in Catalonia and Andalusia; approximately 800,000 are Spanish Muslims and 1.1 million are immigrants, principally from Morocco (Unión 2018). Both categories of Muslims suffer from prejudice, assault, and various forms of persecution. 11

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11 Rogozen-Soltar (2017) examines the differences between the experiences of migrant Muslims versus those of converts in her comprehensive study of Muslims in Granada.
The European Islamophobia Report 2017 details the difficulties endured by Muslims in Spain, distinguishing between institutional Islamophobia and citizen Islamophobia (Aguilera-Carnerero 2018: 600). The report cites statistics published by the non-profit organization Citizen Platform Against Islamophobia (Plataforma Ciudadana contra la Islamofobia, PCI), who reported 546 incidents of Islamophobia in Spain in 2017. Such incidents included physical attacks on the people and spaces of Islam; verbal stereotyping and disparagement; discrimination and harassment in schools, at the work place, and in social settings; and anti-Islamic political campaigns and statements (Plataforma 2018: 5). Women and children count significantly among the victims, together representing 25% of all incidents reported in 2017 (Plataforma 2018: 5). Muslim women constitute the most targeted group, after the category Islam and Muslims in general (Plataforma 2018: 24).

Other occurrences include vandalism and destruction of mosques and of Muslim-owned businesses, establishments, and property; campaigns and demonstrations against the opening of new mosques and businesses; protests against the wearing of hijabs and the denial of basic rights; verbal aggression and threats; proliferation of hate discourses by extreme-right politicians and the media; and defamatory articles, videos, and posts on social media. Cyber-hate is of particular concern, having risen sharply in recent years and accounting for 70% of the Islamophobic incidents reported in 2017 (Plataforma 2018: 5). The Observatory on Islamophobia in the Media (Observatorio de la islamofobia en los medios) found that 66% of the news about Islam in Spain during the first half of 2017 was Islamophobic (Observatorio 2017). Andalusia follows Catalonia as the autonomous community with the second highest number of “offline” incidents documented in 2017, amounting to 13.75% of the total cases reported (Plataforma 2018: 16). Many of the problems in Catalonia were subsequent to – and resulted directly from – the August 2017 terrorist attack for which DAESHT claimed responsibility (de Blas 2017).

One section of the PCI report explicitly discusses the marketing of Al-Andalus, citing a discourse of denial, manipulation of history, and Islamophobic interpretations of history that aim to discredit and negate the Islamic legacy of Spain (Plataforma 2018:6). Numerous scholars have likewise brought up concerns with said marketing, recounting the same problems of authenticity, superficiality, commodification, and exploitation found at other sites of cultural tourism.

Granada’s Albaizín neighborhood has been deemed a “Muslim Disneyland” by Rogozen-Soltar (2017), termed “Moorishland” by Tremlett (2008), and described as a “game

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12 Rogozen-Soltar (2017: 116) makes a similar distinction between “casual racism” and formalized, institutional discrimination, defining the former as that encountered during casual encounters in the public sphere.

13 PCI notes that the actual number of cases of Islamophobia is much higher than that indicated in the report, as only incidents reported to PCI and to related agencies and confirmed news stories are included.

14 A notable example is Tarragona’s so-called “kebab law”: a zoning law initially proposed in 2015 that intended to limit both the number and concentration of Muslim-owned businesses to prevent what officials termed immigrant “ghettos” (Frayer 2015).

15 Unfortunately, examples in this category abound. In January of 2017, former president of Madrid and the Senate and former minister of culture Esperanza Aguirre tweeted that January 2, the anniversary of the Catholic re-occupation of al-Andalus, is “a day of glory for Spaniards” because “with Islam we would not be free” (Hedgecoe 2017). Agustín Conde, Secretary of State for the Defense, stated that one of the targets of the Spanish army was “to prevent his daughter from wearing a burqa” (El diario.es 2017). José Manuel Calzada, director of the Ministry of Education in Melilla, ended a tweet regarding the terrorist attack in Barcelona with #StopIslam (Aguilera-Carnerero 2018: 603).

16 Aguilera-Carnerero (2018:610) offers a sample of social media accounts whose primary objective is to spread hate against Muslims; examples are Observe Islamofilia (Observa Islamofilia), National Fight (Lucha Nacional), No Islam Spain (No Islam España), An Islamophile, Passion for Spain (Pasióm por España), and Alt-Right Spain (Alt-Right España).

17 For example, in June of 2017 the Bishop of Córdoba proclaimed the Great Mosque of Córdoba to be “just Byzantine art”; “the Moors merely paid for the construction work” (Albert 2017).
of smoke and mirrors” by Calderwood (2014: 49). Such scholars criticize the simulacra-like nature of the neighborhood, one that presents tourists with Moroccan-style restaurants, tea shops, and souvenir stores but occasions cultural stereotyping, discrimination, and the commercialization of Islam. It is a highly-regulated, highly-policing area that masks the difficulties of life in Spain as a Muslim. Muslims are presented as artifacts of al-Andalus, as medieval and contemporary Spain are conflated to an artificial, ahistorical moment. Disregarding past and present conflict, the tourist industry strategically appropriates Spain’s Moorish history to sell a story of convivencia that may have never existed in the first place. Many researchers assert that tourists are aware of the artificiality of the product they consume – “the sellers and buyers all know that what they are buying or selling is a fake” – yet they knowingly subscribe to it anyway (Afinoguénova and Martí-Olivella 2008: xiii). Disbelief is willingly suspended for the sake of an experience perceived to be culturally, temporally, and geographically remote.

7. Conclusion

Travel at its core is a means of escape, a quest for difference that results in a commodification of that difference. The success of the Spanish tourist industry today thus remains dependent upon proving its difference, despite the fact that Spain no longer is the obscure territory of centuries past. Developed, industrialized, and fully integrated into the European Union, Spain must therefore market a different difference than in former branding campaigns. The subcategories of travel introduced in the 1990s have evolved to include – embrace, even – peoples and (hi)stories previously excluded from Spanish society. Contemporary tourism efforts admit a plurality that has been historically denied while carefully negotiating between the notions that Spain is distinct – distinct enough to warrant the trials of travel – yet fully modern and European (read: non-Muslim) as its northern neighbors. Perhaps even more than other destinations, Spain mediates competing pressures to be both same and different.

In ways intrinsically linked to power, throughout the past century the Spanish government and public alike have used tourism to endorse a specific Spanish identity. This has involved privileging certain voices while silencing others to present an image of the nation consonant with the political agenda. Yet, at the same time tourism affords power to the industry and to the institutions behind it, tourist demands drive the market and help shape the very product being sold. Tourists thus serve as both broker and buyer, at once constructing and consuming the image of Spain. Non-Muslim tourists come seeking exotic, non-European peoples and spaces within the safety of Europe proper, and the industry accommodates that desire. Because Spain is a top destination for halal tourism, Muslim travelers are now a powerful component of the equation. Yet, at the same time, Muslim residents experience violence, prejudice, and discrimination on virtually all fronts. Spain’s relationship with Islam is phobic and “philic” at once: an ambivalence reflected in policy and practice in the tourist industry and beyond.

Spain finds itself in a predicament familiar to sites of cultural tourism around the world: charged with selling a contested history that has alternately been rejected and revered, suppressed and celebrated, defamed and displayed. Today, Muslims in Spain are witness to –

18 Rogozen-Soltar (2017) examines the criminalization and policing of Muslim migrants in both the Polígono and Albayzín neighborhoods of Granada. Muslims are under constant surveillance in the residential Polígono, while authorities increasingly criminalize and persecute Muslims employed in the touristy Albayzín – despite the seeming celebration of the Moorish legacy there.

19 Scholars are increasingly questioning the extent to which Christians, Muslims, and Jews truly lived together in harmony in medieval Spain. See, e.g., Fernández-Morera (2016).

20 Afinoguénova and Martí-Olivella refer to Boorstin’s (1961) notion of tourism as a manufactured pseudo-event.
and victims of – all of the above. The prevailing narrative presented to tourists and the realities of Spain’s contemporary convivencia are at odds, as discrepant as the factions of Spanish society itself. The tourist industry, media, government, and public at large must acknowledge these contradictions to determine the most effective strategies moving forward, for the sake of both Muslims in Spain and those cultural tourists in search of authentic experience.

About the author

Jessica R. Boll, PhD, is associate professor of Spanish at Carroll University in Waukesha, Wisconsin, USA. Her research centers upon early modern Spanish-Ottoman relations, contemporary Christian-Muslim relations in Spain, shared spaces, and contested perceptions of place. Her investigations combine geography, history, cultural studies, literary studies, Mediterranean studies, and Ottoman studies. She has recently published articles related to the legacy of al-Andalus in contemporary Spain, Spanish tourism, the controversies surrounding the Mosque-Cathedral (Mezquita) of Córdoba, Cervantine captivity, and the depiction of Istanbul in early modern Spanish literature.

References


North American Academics in East Asia: Life in the English-speaking Enclave

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Abstract: While the hiring of international faculty is increasing among competitive universities, some universities face a major challenge in doing so: their foreign hires do not speak the primary language of instruction of that university. This study examines the host country language skills of expatriate academics in two countries: Korea and Japan. Specifically, this study investigates (a) the study effort invested and (b) the language proficiency achieved by native English-speaking professors on tenure track positions. Expatriate faculty had several predictors of their language learning success. Specifically, the well-known factors facilitating language learning played important roles. The findings are discussed within the framework of sociocultural adjustment and career prospects that exist for expatriate professors in Korean and Japanese higher education.

Keywords: cultural adjustment, expatriate faculty, language learning, sociolinguistic integration.

1. Introduction

Internationalization has become a major heading in higher education, and universities worldwide have made efforts to strengthen their global competitiveness by hiring faculty members from abroad. The number of expatriate academics (i.e., internationally mobile academics employed full time on tenure track positions outside their home countries, see Trembath 2016), their ability to publish in international journals, and their teaching in foreign languages all play important roles for improving the global rankings of universities (Saisana et al. 2011). A recent increase of research universities has led East Asian countries to take advantage of academic migration and pursue hiring strategies in line with making faculty bodies of universities more international (McNeill 2008, Rose & McKinley 2018).

South Korea (hereafter referred to as Korea) started to put a focus on increasing the number of expatriate faculty members at universities around the turn of the millennium (Byun et al. 2013). Between 2003 and 2013 the country had achieved a four-fold increase in foreign hires, and by 2014 about 6.5% (=6064) of faculty members came from outside Korea (Green 2015).

In Japan, internationalization of higher education dates back to the late 19th Century but has gained new momentum since the 1980’s with the introduction of programs aimed at bringing large numbers of international students and teachers to Japan (e.g., JET, MEXT). Similar to Korea, Japan has pursued multifaceted goals with internationalization: for instance, introducing international standards into higher education and improving university rankings and global competitiveness, developing the quality of the educational system (e.g., through foreign-language courses), and increasing the number of international students enrolled (Whitsed & Volet 2011). By 2016, around 4% of tenure-track positions were held by

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² Note that this number includes non-tenure track native-speaker language instructors.
expatriate faculty, following a steady increase since 1980 (Huang 2017). Challenges surrounding the integration of expatriate faculty in East Asian higher education have recently garnered scientific attention, and a growing body of research has started to investigate the work and life realities of foreign-born academics in Japan and Korea (e.g., Byun et al. 2013, Froese 2010, Green 2015, Gress & Ilon 2009, Huang 2017).

The present paper investigates expatriate academics’ cultural integration as evidenced by their language learning in the host countries Korea and Japan. First, an overview of what is known about expatriate employees’ linguistic integration in East Asian countries is presented. The majority of research in this area has been conducted on expatriate employees at multinational corporations; however, a smaller body of literature exists on expatriate academics and language learning. Next, the rationale behind the present study and the test variables is introduced, followed by the method section outlining the research design. After presentation of the findings in the result section, they will be discussed according to study populations (expatriate academics in Korea and Japan) and from the larger perspective of their motivations to integrate linguistically into their host societies. Lastly, limitations of the study are mentioned and final conclusions drawn with regard to the implications and significance of the present study.

2. Expatriate academics and language learning

The motivations of academics to migrate to foreign places can be described in terms of self-inflicted migration and, in such cases, job availability largely motivates migration (Ortiga et al. 2018, Peltokorpi & Froese 2009). A combination of personal and professional goals contributes to the researchers’ choice of destination (e.g., location of family or desire to experience a foreign culture). Psychological motivations related to personal well-being in a foreign country have been identified as crucial impetus for career decisions in many professions, including academia (Froese & Peltokorpi 2011, Ortiga et al. 2018). Cultural adjustment is generally listed as a major predictor for expatriate academics’ success (e.g., McClure 2007). If satisfaction with life in the host country is low, academics are more inclined to leave and find jobs elsewhere. Research on cultural adjustment of expatriates is crucial to help inform issues associated with recruitment and retention of foreign-born employees.

Three distinct facets of cultural adjustment have been proposed in the literature (see Black, Mendenhall & Oddou 1991): general adjustment to living in a foreign country, interaction adjustment with local people, and work adjustment. Whereas research on expatriate faculty integration has traditionally focused on work-related adjustment, general and interaction adjustment (also known as sociocultural adjustments) have received little attention so far. These concepts are, however, crucial for predicting the success of academic migration and thus deserve closer attention.

Interaction adjustment is centered on the notion of linguistic integration: i.e., learning the local language, and is considered the most problematic of all adjustment types (Froese 2012; Peltokorpi 2007, 2008; Selmer 2006). Even though English functions as the lingua franca of academia and expatriate faculty are generally hired to teach in foreign languages, life outside the university may be difficult without adequate local-language skills (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. 2005, Selmer 2006). In ethnically and linguistically homogenous countries such as Korea and Japan, cultural participation is seriously impeded by a lack of local language skills (Froese 2010; Froese, Peltokorpi & Ko 2012; Tsuneyoshi 2018). Expatriate faculty experience an impediment to their social lives when they have not learned the local

\footnote{National and private universities underwent short periods of decline, whereas municipal/prefectural universities saw a steady increase.}
language (Froese 2012; Takeuchi, Yun & Russell 2002). In addition, there are indications that lack of language proficiency may negatively affect career development (Lauring 2008; Wilczewski, Søderberg & Gut 2018).

A recent study of the cultural adjustment of expatriate academics in Korea showed that 76% of participants were experiencing problems that they attributed to their low Korean language proficiency (Froese 2012). Half of the participants stated that low language skills impaired their ability to participate in Korean culture. Insufficient Korean skills are likely a widespread problem among expatriate faculty there, potentially jeopardizing academic and cultural integration. Japan has had more success with cultural integration of expatriate faculty, as many foreign-born academics who are appointed to tenure-track positions hold (undergraduate or graduate) degrees from Japanese universities (approximately 44%; see Huang 2017).

With internationalization remaining a priority in Korean and Japanese higher education, the question of how successful linguistic integration is and how motivated foreign-born professors are to learn the local language is important (Welch, Welch & Piekkari 2005). Studies in the private sector have shown a complex relationship between the expectations of the host institution and the realities arising from expatriate employees’ behavior in terms of learning the local language (Zhang & Harzing 2016). Low host country language skills frequently occur when the linguistic distance between the expatriates’ native language and the host country language is great, such as for Western expatriates in Korea and Japan. This can cause severe adjustment problems for the expatriate community (Selmer & Lauring 2015).

As pointed out by Harzing and Feely (2008), when expatriates’ language skill is low, the relationship between expatriates and host country nationals remains distant. Expatriates may experience situations where their colleagues are not able to or do not want to speak a foreign language with them or where companies encourage the use of the local language. When learning difficulties arise due to linguistic distance between native and target language, expatriates find themselves in a situation where language learning requires more time, effort, and resources. As this potentially comes at a detriment to spare time and work time, the question is how many expatriates are actually willing to incur this increased cost of linguistic integration.

Aside from actual language skill, readiness and willingness to learn the local language is also considered important in the context of multinational corporations, as it symbolically represents an aspect of trust formation between expatriates and local employees (Bordia & Bordia 2015). The study effort that expatriates invest in learning the host country language is a crucial indicator for expatriates’ motivation to invest in their relationship with the host country’s society or corporate society.

While a small body of research has investigated expatriate language learning of linguistically distant languages in the corporate world involving East Asian host countries (Froese et al. 2012; Zhang & Harzing 2016; Zhang, Harzing & Fan 2018), expatriate academics have remained underrepresented in this research (Peltokorpi 2007, 2008, 2010; Zhang & Peltokorpi 2015). In East Asian multinational corporations, Western expatriates frequently do not have adequate language abilities to integrate socially and professionally (Zhang & Harzing 2016; Zhang et al. 2018). A similar pattern can be found in expatriate academics (Froese 2012).

Previous research has focused on issues related to the problems – for the corporations and the expatriates – arising from low language proficiency (e.g., Selmer & Lauring 2015); however, the psychological and social motivations experienced by expatriates when faced with the choice of whether to learn the host country language have not been investigated. The present study aims to fill this knowledge gap by providing a detailed look at the personal
motivations and abilities behind expatriate academics’ host country language learning and their resulting learning success.

The goal of the present study was two-fold. First, it investigates how proficient expatriate academics whose native language is (North American) English are in the local languages in their host countries of Korea or Japan. Second, it determines the readiness of expatriate academics to undertake language study, as evidenced by their study effort. Based on previous literature on expatriate language learning involving distant languages, it was expected that proficiency would be relatively low (e.g., Zhang et al. 2018).

According to traditional language learning theories, increase in proficiency is ultimately related to personal aptitude to learning languages, which can be defined as a special talent for language learning and a ceiling on success (Doughty 2019). When learning motivation and context are similar, while at the same time personality facets of the learners are controlled, differences in aptitude determine ultimate language attainment. So-called “good language learners” (Rubin 2005) show high aptitude, which means they excel cognitively at learning languages and can do so quickly, frequently accompanied by mastery of a number of foreign languages (Dörnyei 2005).

As with any learning task, spending a sufficient amount of time studying the language is also crucial for achieving high proficiency, and those students willing to devote more study time to language learning ultimately achieve higher proficiency (Bak, Long, Vega-Mendoza & Sorace 2016). Motivational aspects on the part of the learner, in particular so-called instrumental motivation – a sense that one needs a language for a certain task – constitute the basis for increased learner engagement and thus higher proficiency (Saito, Dewaele & Hanzawa 2017). In terms of increased study effort, it is expected that better language learners show more study effort, as learning success leads to increased study engagement (Rubin 2005).

A certain bondedness to a particular culture and thus language can also contribute to language learning effort. Willingness to integrate into a society is regarded as an important driver for language study, and people who desire to become part of a foreign culture – for personal or professional reasons – tend to prioritize learning the local language (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie 2017).

In a similar vein, time spent in a foreign country increases the psychological bond to the culture and leads people to increase their study efforts to become more proficient in the host language. Language study – in particular the study of a language linguistically distant to one’s native language – is a time-consuming task that requires the learners to devote a substantial amount of time. With spare time scarce for expatriate professors on tenure track in East Asia – due to skewed work-life balance (Bader, Froese & Kraeh 2016) and intense publishing pressure (Lee & Lee 2013) – it stands to reason that time for language study could be subtracted from working time. Thus, increased language study might take away from overall work productivity; or, vice versa, fewer working hours (and less productivity) could provide the opportunity for increased language study.

The following hypotheses were tested by the present study:

• **Hypothesis 1**: High host country language proficiency can be predicted by good language learning aptitude, increased study effort, and individually perceived need to learn a language on the part of the expatriate academics.

• **Hypothesis 2**: Study effort invested in learning the host country language displayed by expatriate academics is significantly related to good language learning aptitude, an expatriate’s willingness to integrate into the host society, the time she or he has spent in the host country, and decreased work productivity.
3. Methods

3.1 Participants and sampling
Expatriate faculty members originating from the United States of America and Canada, in tenure track positions at six Korean and eight Japanese universities and research institutions, were contacted and invited to participate in an anonymous online survey asking them about their attitudes toward and experiences with learning the Korean/Japanese language. One participant had recently been naturalized as a citizen of Japan but was still included in the data. The requirement was that Korean or Japanese was learned as a second language. No participant was excluded based on their language skills, resulting in beginners of Korean/Japanese as well as professors of Korean or Japanese studies, highly proficient in the respective language, participating in the survey. Ethnic Korean and Japanese professors with foreign nationalities were not included. The survey was open between December 2017 and April 2018. Eligible participants were searched for through the offices of international affairs at 14 universities and subsequently invited to take part in the survey. The overall response rate was 33% (N=45). Due to the limited target population of the study (nationals of North American English-speaking countries), a small sample size was expected.

A total of 28 professors (5 female and 23 male, USA 22 and Canada 6, age range 30-64, mean age 46.3±10.1) of various ranks and disciplines were recruited from six Korean universities. See Table 1 for an overview of gender and job rank of the participants from Korea.

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The sample of expatriate faculty members from Japan included a total of 17 professors (6 female and 11 male, USA 14 and Canada 3, age range 35-64, mean age 47.2±11.4) of various ranks and disciplines (see Table 2) from eight universities/research institutions in Japan.

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The male majority in both samples reflects the pattern that exists within expatriate faculty at East Asian universities, where male international researchers are more likely to be hired for tenure-track positions compared to female international researchers, and academic mobility is more commonly recognized as a predominantly male activity (Froese 2012, Huang 2017).

3.2 Variables
The survey questions were aimed at measuring variables that can inform about (a) participants’ time and efforts invested in studying Korean or Japanese, and (b) the proficiency level they had achieved in the language (see Table 3 for an overview of the variables). When feasible, variables were combined into meaningful composite variables by standardizing them to a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1 and calculating their mean.
The following single-measure variables were included in the statistical models: self-reported Korean or Japanese language skill (measured on an ordinal scale from 1 to 5, with 1 representing no language skills and 5 very high proficiency), self-reported good language learning ability (no=0, yes=1), number of foreign languages in which an intermediate level had been reached by participants, and average weekly study hours devoted to studying Korean/Japanese. Furthermore, the number of semesters a participant had been employed in their host country, their willingness to participate in the local culture (from 1 to 5, with 1 being the least interested), and their perceived need to learn the local language to navigate their social and professional lives in their host countries (measured from 1, no need, to 3, urgent need to learn the local language) were included.

Study effort was a composite variable composed of (1) average weekly study hours and (2) percentage of time in a host country that participants had taken language classes (measured in %). Language learning aptitude was another composite variable composed of (1) good language learning skills and the (2) number of foreign languages in which an intermediate level had been reached by participants. A third composite variable was work productivity, composed of (1) average weekly work hours (measured on an ordinal scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being 35 hours and less and 5 being 55 hours and more) and (2) number of first-author publications (i.e., conference papers, articles and books) that have come out within the last two years. Cases of highly proficient speakers (N=6) were excluded from the sample for the regression model as it was not expected that they show any study effort.

Table 3: Variable statistics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language skill</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good language learning ability</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of foreign languages learned</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly study hours</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>2.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semesters in country</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>14.82</td>
<td>11.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to participate in local culture</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived need to learn local language</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Composite</strong>: study effort</td>
<td>-0.78</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Composite</strong>: language-learning aptitude</td>
<td>-1.19</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Composite</strong>: work productivity</td>
<td>-1.32</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two linear-regression models were run to determine which factors can best predict (a) the study effort that expatriate professors invest in learning the local language of their host country, and (b) the proficiency they have attained in the language. Collinearity (Field 2005) did not appear to be an issue (maximum generalized variance inflation factor=1.8; Fox & Monette 1992) and visual inspection of residual plots did not show any obvious deviations from homoscedasticity or normality.

In the qualitative part of the study, participants were asked what they considered the greatest problem preventing them from engaging in more intensive language study and achieving a higher proficiency in the language of their host country.

The sample size for descriptive analysis was 45 participants: 28 from Korean and 17 from Japanese research institutions. The sample size for regression analysis was 39 participants: 27 from Korean and 12 from Japanese research institutions.
4. Results

4.1 Descriptive results
Participants recruited in Korea had been working in Korea for an average of 15.2 semesters (±10.7), while participants recruited in Japan had been employed there for 25.9 (±24.6) semesters. Figure 1 presents an overview of the Korean and Japanese language proficiencies as reported by the participants.

Figure 1: Overview of Korean/Japanese proficiency levels (N=45; note that the group of highly proficient speakers was excluded from the regression models).

Obvious differences in language proficiency emerge between the Korean and Japanese samples. Language skill is clearly higher for the professors working at Japanese institutions, with approximately 30% being highly proficient. The rate of low-proficiency language learners is around 30% in the Japanese sample, but close to 60% in the Korean sample. Expatriate professors in Japan are better suited to function in the Japanese academic world (for instance by participating in department meetings and conducting academic work in Japanese), while this is rather rare for expatriate professors in Korea. The Korean sample (due to their lesser proficiency) focused their Korean language-learning effort more on being able to navigate through daily life outside of academia.

In terms of study effort, it was found that the majority of respondents reported investing relatively low effort into studying the local language. The Korean sample showed more study effort than the Japanese sample, which had better language proficiency in general. In Korea, expatriate professors had attended Korean classes more rigorously than their Japanese counterparts during their time in the host country. Table 4 presents an overview of the main variables and their differences between the samples in Korea and Japan.

Table 4: Overview of variables by country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Language learning skills</th>
<th>Foreign languages learned</th>
<th>Japanese/ Korean skills</th>
<th>Willingness for cultural integration</th>
<th>Perceived need to learn language</th>
<th>Weekly study hours</th>
<th>% of time in country enrolled in class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2 Linear regressions

Results of the first regression model revealed significant predictors for study effort: $F(2, 75)=29, p<.001$, power analysis (Cohen’s $f^2$)=0.94; see Table 5.

Table 5: Results of the linear regression predicting study effort.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard error</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>8.83</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semesters in country</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>-1.28</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work productivity</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language aptitude</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to participate in culture</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>6.61</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=39, $R^2=.44$

Important factors for study effort were language learning aptitude and work productivity. Generally, better language learning aptitude led to higher study effort on the part of the participants. Concerning work productivity, the relationship to study effort was a negative one: higher levels of work productivity led to a decrease in study effort. Willingness to integrate into the host society and the semesters a professor had spent working and living in the host country had no influence on their study effort.

To test whether participants who showed higher language learning aptitude and less work productivity possessed better Korean/Japanese skills to begin with, group comparisons with Mann Whitney $U$ tests were conducted between (a) participants with high and low levels of language learning aptitude and (b) professors who display high and low levels of work productivity. No differences in Korean/Japanese proficiency were found among participants reporting different levels of language learning aptitude ($p=0.06$) or those reporting different levels of work productivity ($p=0.88$).

The second regression model investigating language proficiency also yielded a number of significant predictor variables: $F(3, 35)=7.1, p<.001$, power analysis (Cohen’s $f^2$)=0.5; see Table 6.

Table 6: Results of the linear regression predicting Korean/Japanese language skill level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard error</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good language learner</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of foreign languages learned</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>-3.32</td>
<td>0.002 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly study hours</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>0.03 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived need of local language</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=39, $R^2=.38$

Here, better language learning skills, a high number of foreign languages spoken at an intermediate level, and more weekly study hours were predictors for good Korean/Japanese proficiency. The perceived need to know the local language to navigate through daily life in the host country did not contribute to language proficiency. It is noteworthy that this model is characterized by less power (power analysis=0.5, $R^2=.38$) than the study effort model (power analysis=0.9, $R^2=.44$).
4.3 Qualitative results
The answers to the question of what constitutes the greatest obstacle to investing more time and achieving a higher proficiency in the host country language can be classified into eight distinct categories (ordered according to most frequently named reasons, see total number of mentions in brackets):

(a) Lack of time (due to personal and professional commitments) (36)
(b) Language is considered too difficult to acquire the level that is necessary for work and social life (11)
(c) Lack of opportunity to practice with native speakers (11)
(d) Personal reasons: I don’t want to learn the language; I am not motivated or disciplined enough to learn the language; I am a bad language learner (11)
(e) Lack of institutional support or encouragement (10)
(f) Language skill is not considered necessary or important; there is no benefit to learning the language (7)
(g) Suboptimal language pedagogy in classes (5)
(h) High cost of language classes (3)

In the following section, the statistical results from the regression analyses will be discussed and the findings stemming from them will be put into context with the help of the qualitative answers from the participants. First, the results concerning study effort will be discussed; next the results concerning host country language proficiency will be the focus.

5. Discussion
The aim of the present study was to investigate the state of local language proficiency of expatriate faculty working in Korean and Japanese higher education and determine which factors can predict better linguistic integration of foreign-born professors into their host countries. Although research on expatriate faculty at East Asian universities has been growing over the last decade, the topic of sociocultural and linguistic integration has remained underrepresented (Zhang et al. 2018).

The present study identified a number of predictors that can help anticipate how well expatriate faculty learn the Korean or Japanese language and how much study effort they put into doing so. The findings are discussed in detail below and embedded into the larger context of cultural adjustment and career prospects for expatriate professors in Korean and Japanese higher education. Results are based on a small sample size and should thus be considered preliminary.

According to the Language Difficulty Ranking of the Foreign Service Institute of the United States (a government agency for training diplomats and employees in foreign affairs),
Korean is in the category of “exceptionally difficult for native English speakers” and takes around 2200 hours (or 88 weeks) to reach medium proficiency in the language (U.S. Department of State 2018). Proficiency improved slightly with years a participant had been working in Korea: to get from basic knowledge of useful phrases (average time in Korea approximately six years) to being able to have short and simple conversations with Koreans (average time in Korea ten years), about four years can be estimated; it then takes another two years on average to get to being confident talking with colleagues and others in Korean (average time in Korea twelve years).

Overcoming learning difficulties that result from linguistic differences between the native language and the target language can be a challenging and time-consuming task (Luef & Sun 2019). While increased exposure to a linguistic environment (living in the host country) is undoubtedly an important facilitator in the second language learning context and, in particular, for adult learners of a new language (Freed et al. 2004), learning progress can be slow and ultimately demotivating for learners. As one participant said:

*I have taken night classes [for six hours] a week, a simple class for faculty (two hours a week), and done intensive language exchanges for two summers. Even so, I have not quite reached the point at which I can truly gain fluency like I have in four other languages.*

Weekly study hours also contributed to overall language proficiency. Adult language learners often benefit from self-study and, in the age of electronic/mobile language learning, self-directed learning has become increasingly useful, especially among people lacking the time for formal instruction (Luef et al. 2018, Luef et al. 2019).

The perceived need to learn the local language had no impact on actual language skill of the expatriate academics surveyed. The majority of participants stated that host country language skills are essential for working and living in the host country; however, this perceived urge to learn did not translate into better language skills. Participants recognized the importance of learning Korean/Japanese but frequently justified their insufficient language proficiency with learning difficulties due to linguistic distance between English and the local East-Asian language. One participant lamented:

*...never reaching the level... where meaningful conversations can be made.*

...While another stated:

*There is no career benefit to Korean proficiency below native level.*

Language proficiency was higher in the Japanese sample, which differed from the Korean sample in two important ways: professors working at Japanese institutions reported better overall language abilities but fewer weekly study hours. These findings can be reconciled with the assumption that more expatriate academics arrive in Japan with previously acquired Japanese language skills, which is supported by the fact that a high number of them have graduated from Japanese universities (Huang 2017). In addition, local language proficiency may be considered more important for Japanese hiring practices, since Japanese scholars have often been trained at Japanese institutions. Contrarily, a large majority of Korean professors have been educated abroad (frequently the United States or Europe) and thus may create a more multilingual work experience in their departments. Generally, for learners who have reached an intermediate proficiency level in the local language there may be fewer incentives to continue their language studies. As one participant pointed out:
I've reached a level where I can do most of what I want to do in Japanese, and so I am not motivated enough to do more.

While Japanese ranks with Korean among the most difficult languages to learn for native English speakers (U.S. Department of State 2018), it seems that American professors hired in Japanese higher education come with some level of Japanese language experience. A higher percentage of the Japanese sample reported having an ethnic Japanese family member (=60%) than the percentage of the Korean sample having an ethnic Korean family member (=40%). Family ties to a host country obviously foster cultural integration, including language learning. Huang (2017) explains good Japanese language skills among the expatriate faculty in Japan as related to their more positive career outlooks and the fact that expatriate professors can plan for a successful academic future in Japan.

Concerning study effort, good language learning aptitude and lower work productivity were the main predictors for high study effort, whereas time spent in the host country and willingness to integrate into the host society did not factor into increased study effort. It stands to reason that more able language learners can maintain study motivation for longer and will invest increased effort into learning the local language. It seems reasonable to assume that time spent in Korea/Japan and willingness to integrate into the host society would lead professors to set more time aside for studying the local language; however, the reality of working at an East-Asian university may prove too demanding in terms of research productivity so that language learning does not rise to a high priority. As a matter of fact, work productivity was negatively correlated with study effort, and the less time a respondent spent working, the more time she or he spent studying language. Language learning thus seems to come at the cost of work productivity and ultimately career goals, leaving many expatriate professors with the decision between advancing their academic career or furthering their cultural integration into the host country. As one participant noted, there is also a noticeable “lack of importance placed on (expectation of) Korean language ability”, leading expatriate faculty to consider language study as less important than their academic work.

The overall study effort as shown by both the Korean and Japanese sample was modest. While the majority of respondents had attended Korean classes for an average of 31% of their time in Korea (however, 25% of low-proficiency learners had never taken a class), people spent an average of 1.6 hours per week studying. Among professors in Japan, 19% of respondents had attended Japanese classes during their employment period, and the average time spent studying Japanese was 1.3 hours per week. Possessing better overall language proficiency, the Japanese sample would be expected to invest less effort.

The findings from the qualitative part of the study can help put the statistical results into the appropriate context. Respondents from both countries explained their low study efforts primarily by time constraints and difficult work-life balance that leaves little time for activities beside work and family life, with participants stating that the most severe problems associated with studying Korean/Japanese are

...finding necessary time and energy. Our jobs (and in my case, my marriage) demand a lot of both.

Between work, family, physical fitness and church, it’s hard to have the time to learn Korean language and culture as I would like.

Pressure to publish in high-profile journals (Lee & Lee 2013) and engage in service work other than teaching and research is omnipresent for expatriate faculty at Korean and Japanese universities and a requirement for promotion at many universities, forcing professors to prioritize their careers.
Finding the time to study Korean is the biggest challenge given the pressures placed on international faculty to publish, publish, publish.

Time needed to [study Japanese] would otherwise detract from the fulfilment of professional responsibilities/expectations.

Difficulty in learning Korean/Japanese as a native English speaker and the long time it takes to reach an intermediate level, together with a lack of opportunities to practice the new language (many Koreans/Japanese prefer to speak English to their foreign-born colleagues) were named as major reasons for not possessing better host country language skills. In addition, personal reasons, including having no interest in or lacking motivation/discipline to study the Korean or Japanese language, were mentioned frequently to explain low study effort. Many expatriate professors complained about the lack of institutional support or encouragement from their university. Partial teaching relief and financial support were cited as crucial factors that could help expatriate academics with language learning.

In explaining their low study effort, participants also mentioned the lack of suitable Korean/Japanese classes and teaching pedagogy.

Most Korean classes are designed for 20-somethings or housewives from [South-East] Asia or Russia.

The teaching method is arcane. They focus too much on grammar rather than communicative Korean. Need to develop a better system for adults who are 30 plus.

Textbooks seem to be mostly held over from the '80s and focus too much on business Japanese.

In addition, the English language was described as ubiquitous in Seoul, providing another discouragement to foreigners who want to learn the Korean language.

Korean people are generally unwilling to speak... Korean slowly. ...They always speak English, no matter how many times I ask them to speak Korean so I can practice.

Here, a difference arises for participants in Japan, where English proficiency is less widespread, forcing foreigners to learn the Japanese language (Yamao & Sekiguchi 2015). Nonetheless, some participants reported a tendency to be addressed in English: “many Japanese want to speak English to us instead of Japanese”.

One comment appeared multiple times in the questionnaires: Korean/Japanese skills represent non-transportable assets. Several respondents echoed the sentiment that learning Korean would mean “giving up time from either family or career to learn something which is time intensive and... doesn’t help me much if I leave Korea”. Similarly, one respondent mentioned “Korean, being a language isolate; [it] doesn’t offer the opportunity to use it in a number of places”. Korean and Japanese do not belong to the so-called global languages defined as having a large number of speakers and a linguistic community not defined strictly along ethnic lines (Chan 2017) or as having an influential Internet status (Ronen et al. 2014). The relative limited use of the two languages globally may contribute to their status as less commonly taught second languages in North America (though both have become more popular in recent years), making it less likely that North American academics would be familiar with them from second-language instruction prior to arrival in Korea or Japan.

This study focused on expatriate faculty from the United States and Canada; however, the findings may not be restricted to North American English speakers per se. While there is
agreement that expatriate experiences are biased by country of origin (Selmer 2001), there are many common issues that apply to all expatriate faculty equally (see Froese 2012). Language learning, of course, is profoundly impacted by one’s native language. Expatriate professors with native languages that show more resemblances to Korean (such as Japanese) find it easier to become proficient in Korean.

In terms of time that can be allotted to studying the local language and the factors that drive study effort, large similarities between different nationalities can be assumed. Academic life in the Korean and Japanese tenure-track systems is stressful, especially during early career stages, as promotion is highly dependent upon publications in internationally indexed journals, which are tedious and hard to produce. Any available time will thus be used to work on career-oriented activities, leaving little time for pursuing activities that do not directly contribute to career success. The fast life in academia, characterized by high job insecurity (evidenced by short work contracts and high job fluctuation) means that people have to decide whether it is worth investing time and effort gaining access to a culture when it is all but clear if they will be able to hold onto their jobs (i.e., get contract renewals or promotions).

6. Conclusion

The present study investigated the host country language skills of expatriate academics from English-speaking North American countries in Korea and Japan. Specifically, predictors for language proficiency and study effort were sought. It was found that language proficiency was mainly determined by the language learning aptitude of participants and the weekly study hours devoted to learning Korean/Japanese. Increased study effort could also be predicted by good language learning aptitude in combination with decreased work productivity.

The results of the present study suggest that local language skills of North American expatriate faculty at Korean and Japanese universities vary by country. Even though the present study was based on a small sample size and the findings should therefore be considered preliminary, the results are well within what would be expected based on previous literature: personal aptitude and attitude toward language learning is highly predictive for both study effort and language proficiency. In addition, less work productivity and thus fewer working hours mean more time for language study.

Learning the local language of the host country is essential to avoid the creation of “social ghettos” of expatriate faculty with compatriots. The results of the present study indicate that North American expatriate professors in Korea and Japan are largely confined to an English-speaking enclave. To exit this enclave, increased efforts to learn the local language are necessary; but the obstacles remain high, as personal disposition largely dictates language learning success, and increased study effort comes at the cost of work productivity (and thus career objectives).

It might not be a realistic goal to expect North American expatriates (in academia as well as the corporate world) to be able to invest a lot of time and reach high proficiency in a previously unfamiliar East Asian language. Future research should focus on the question of how expatriate professors can further their social integration and maximize their opportunities in the educational systems of their host countries even without high proficiency in the host country language (see e.g. Zhang et al. 2018). Such an approach can certainly contribute to the successful academic internationalization of East Asian higher education.

Acknowledgements

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References


“Glocalization” and Intercultural Representation in Filipino TV Commercials: A Multidimensional Discourse Analysis

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Muban Chombueng Rajabhat University, Thailand

Abstract: This paper looks at how Filipino “glocalizes” international brands in TV commercials and how it links to customers’ culture and norms in the Philippine context. Four TV commercials from the food industry were purposively identified as target samples. These samples were then compared to other TV commercials in two different contexts, namely, Thailand and the USA to see the process of glocalization and interculturality. Improvised tools from Kress and Van Leeuwen’s inter-semiosis (2006) and O’Halloran’s SF-MDA (2011) framework were used in data analysis. Findings on multimodal-discourse analysis suggested that TV commercials constructed the “glocal” identity in various representations such as visual, sociolinguistic, characterization, and sociocultural connection. It is argued that these combinations of findings provide some support for the conceptual knowledge between glocalization and interculturality within the contemporary customer culture.

Keywords: globalization, glocalization, multidimensional discourse analysis, Filipino TVC, identity.

1. Introduction

In the world of commerce specifically advertising, there is increasing demand for television commercials within the past couple of years (Dunnett 2013, Johnson 2012, Johnson 2013, Matrix 2014). The impact of the television medium in advertising has shown numerous advantages such as additional revenues, popularity of brands, and inclusion of company's trademark in the global market (see Boyland & Haldorf 2013, McKelvey & Grady 2004, Panic et al. 2013, Saumendra & Padhy 2012 for more discussion). To attain the interest of local customers, a number of international companies are adopting the so-called glocal strategy: a combination of globalization and localization modes of advertising. Giulianotti and Robertson (2006: 171) assert that while “glocalization” is in demand, it is important to see the ways in which these companies “construct meanings, identities, and institutional forms within the sociological context of globalization”; while Shamsuddoha (2008: 56) writes of how they “accommodate the local norms of the user or consumer in a local market”.

In the Philippines – a brand-conscious market – advertising plays a significant role in promoting products due to the country’s geographical location. Galvez (2018) reported that 59% of Filipino consumers subscribe to a cable provider, while just 16% subscribe to a magazine; 45% of online Filipino consumers watch video commercials once a day or more. TV advertising directs discourses that propagate persuasion and powerful language in promoting a company’s product. The analysis of such phenomena affords insight into the impact of advertising in peoples’ lives in the globalized world. Along with economic growth, however, there is increasing concern over on advertising’s impact on culture, norms, traditions, and people's thinking (Denzin 2016, Hartley 2011, Alpat & Aksu 2014, De Mooij 2018, Dorobantu et al. 2017, Gurun & Butler 2012, Strizhakova & Coulter 2013).

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Previous studies have reported that cultural appreciation, norms, and tradition depend on customer's “behavior in a particular product being advertised” (Amiry et al. 2017: 478). Liao (2012: 67) argues that, although customers' behavior is key, it is still important to discuss the relation between advertising and culture since “glocalization is becoming dominant in the advertising industry”. This notion of the “glocal” becomes paramount, as contemporary cultural identities are hybrid, complex, and often contradictory, with the media playing a crucial role in their reconfiguration. In many contexts, the characters displayed to TV audiences are no longer political ones based on citizenship in a national community but economic ones based on participation in a global consumer market (Morley & Robins 1996). Advertising on a TV screen demonstrates multimodality, through which different modes of representation – such as image, music, culture, and gesture – are embedded.

Ideally, the role of multidimensionality is to study language (linguistics) and relate it to another discipline. Due to modernization, linguists discuss language in a context that includes interactions between spoken languages, kinetic features (gaze, body posture, gesture) and cinematography effects (e.g., camera angle and frame size) (see Baldry & Thibault 2006, Iedema 2001a for further discussion). The multimodal analysis presented in this study is for illustrative purposes only. A more comprehensive linguistic analysis could have been presented, in addition to the inclusion of other semiotic resources: studio lighting, clothing, proxemics, seating arrangement, and so forth. To our knowledge, no study so far has addressed how this concept of multidimensionality applies in TV commercials. This study seeks to understand how international companies localize their products in TV commercials.

2. Background

2.1 Multidimensional discourse analysis in TV ads

Identifying one’s culture is a sociocultural process that evolves continuously evokes and changes from time to time. With this in mind, we used the compositional trilogy of information value, salience, and framing (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006; O’Halloran 2011; Halliday 1978, 1994) to unveil the “glocal” identity embedded in television commercials (henceforth TVCs). This tri-stratal conceptualization of meaning relates low-level features in the text (e.g., images and sound) to higher-order semantics through sets of inter-related lexico-grammatical systems and, ultimately, to social contexts of culture. Within this conceptualization, three meta-function distinctions can be recognized:

- Ideational meaning: i.e., ideas about the world
  - Textual meaning: organization of meaning into coherent units
  - Experiential meaning: representation/portrayal of experience in the world
- Logical meaning: construction of logical relations in the world
- Interpersonal meaning: enactment of social relations

Multimodal discourse analysis (MDA; O’Halloran 2011) is an emerging paradigm in discourse studies which extends the study of language to examine the compatibility of language with other resources: i.e., images, scientific symbolism, gesture, action, music and sound. O’Halloran takes an introspective, systemic functional (SF) approach to multimodal discourse analysis that involves developing theoretical and practical approaches for analyzing written, printed and electronic texts, three-dimensional sites and other realms of activity where semiotic resources – i.e., spoken and written language, visual imagery, mathematical symbolism, sculpture, architecture, gesture, and other physiological modes – create meaning. A multimodal social semiotic approach provides a richer perspective on the many means
involved in making and understanding meaning, on the forms of knowledge, on the social relations evident in pedagogy, on the (self)-making of identity and on the recognition of agency and of many kinds of semiosis at work in a particular context.

The school of multimodal social semiotics has two aspects: first, multimodality focuses on the material means for representation, the resources for making texts (that is, on modes); second, social semiosis provides a theoretical framework for focusing on all aspects of meaning-making: on the agents who make signs and such complex forms as texts, on the processes of meaning-making and on the theoretical entities involved in this: sign, text, genre, discourse, and interest are all examples. These two aspects are interconnected at all times yet remain distinct. The educational consequences of taking a multimodal social semiotic approach derive from both aspects through different means, in line with their distinct foci.

In TVCs, sound works both as a single representational mode and as a mode in relation to images and texts forming synaesthesia-like experiences (Kress & Van Leeuwen 2001: 122). TVC continuity can be strategically created and disturbed by altering rhythmic and melodic forms. Speech patterns, as well as music and sound effects, may generate or forestall continuance as a way to persuade customers. The aural track creates a continuation of forward motion while providing support for the development of other aural and visual elements.

Meyer (1956) emphasizes that individuals bring their own experience and training to understand style-specific (melodic, rhythmic and harmonic) incorporation of musical completion and closure. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) highlight the integration of two semiotic modes in multimodal compositions: (a) the pattern of spatial composition and (b) rhythm: the model of temporal composition. The former operates in texts in which the modes are spatially co-present (as in print advertising); the latter works in texts which unfold over time (as in TV advertising). Multimodal texts such as film and TV use both space and time, while rhythm remains the dominant integrative principle (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006: 177). This combination of inputs from various scholars of multidimensionality provides support for the conceptual premise of how TVCs shape “glocalization” and intercultural representation in a particular context.

2.2 Representing cultural identity in TV commercials

Identity is often described in terms of peoples’ sense of membership in social categories (Tajfel 1981). Discourse analysts stress that language has a fundamental role in expressing and constituting such a sense of belonging. The linguistic anthropologist Kroskrity (1999: 111) defines identity as “the linguistic construction of membership in one or more social groups or categories”. Social identity may constitute points of reference for identification, such as race, gender, age, or ethnicity. In TVCs, “glocal” identities emerge from the integration of global and local cultural texts or signifiers in a dynamic inter-semiosis of audio and visual modes triggering context-specific consumption appeals.

Consumer identity – or, the narrative of the consuming self – partakes in the institutional ideology of marketing and the dominant discourses propagated by advertising. In the “glocal” market space, consumer identity is co-constituted by apparently contradictory values of sameness and difference (Ransome 2005), collectivism and individuation, adequation (sufficient similarity) and distinction (Bucholtz & Hall 2005). The “glocal” identity is reflected in the consumers' desire to conform to local consumption sentiments as well as deviate from those to achieve some unique self-image by adhering to the global. Other theorists (e.g., Yang 2012, Schwartz & Halegoua 2015, Yannopoulou et al. 2013) are adamant that advertising does ideological work that buttresses a particular distribution of power in society by representing model identities and idealized images, and by reflecting and constructing social relationships. By manipulating social values and attitudes, advertising is fulfilling functions traditionally met by religion (Leiss et al. 2013). All these scholars concur
that advertising does not merely reflect social life; the relationship between advertising and society is a two-way street. Representations of community in advertising have their basis in the social order; but, at the same time, the social order is constantly being re-created by reference to model discourses such as advertising (see Rice & Atkin 2012, for more discussion).

2.3 “Glocalization” of products on the screen

Global-local interactions, either at the commercial (Foglio & Stanevicius 2007) or cultural level (Bernal-Merino 2016), constitute “glocalization”. “Glocalization” enables global corporations to tailor their global products to the local market and local corporations to match their local products to niche global markets (Berry 2013). A global corporation may provide marketing, funding, and infrastructure to develop a product; but the finished form of that product is dictated by local consumption prerogatives. “Glocalization” is a negotiated process whereby local customer preferences are clubbed into market offerings via bottom-up mutual efforts (Cunningham & Craig 2016).

The visual content and design of an ad makes the initial impact and causes us to take note of it. How its image is portrayed on the television plays a crucial part in the consumer’s understanding. Both elements, psychological and linguistic, are essential in producing the brand image of the product in public. The existence of print- and screen-based technologies have re-innovated the definition of literacy. Traditional descriptions are no longer comprehensive enough in a world where texts are becoming increasingly multimodal, communicating through graphics, pictures, and layout techniques as well as through words.

In TV advertising, consumer discourses propagate a powerful and persuasive language in promoting new brands, which may bring changes in the existing local modes of consumption. Analysis of such discursive phenomena provides insight into the creative processes that are manifested in TV advertising and emerging cultural patterns. This paper seeks to answer the following questions:

(1) How is Filipino cultural identity being presented in the selected TVCs?
(2) How does it link to “glocalization” and intercultural representation?

3. Methods

This study is situated within a multidimensional framework where different methods were employed: both content analysis and multidimensional analysis of “glocal” and intercultural identity. In the preliminary phase, we collected 534 TVCs from the Philippine TV networks during 2018-2019. These TVCs were uploaded to YouTube. Our purpose was to examine the varying permutations of global, local, and “glocal” cultural-identity portrayals in TVCs. Using content analysis, we categorized commercials according to their product type and brand. After we classified types, we extracted only the products with the highest number of TVCs. These products have achieved a high net income revenue based on a 2017 annual report of the Philippine Stock Commission. Since each product has its own purpose, we made a decision to analyze the top four products from the food industry gaining the highest number of TVCs. We chose the food industry because the top products were from the food industry, followed by beverages and medicine. Banerjee (1995) writes that it is better to pilot 4-7 samples when multidimensional analysis seeks to analyze the “glocal” and intercultural representation of one community on a particular platform.

After we extracted our four products as our target sample (see Table 1), we then compared these four products to other countries: the USA (the origin country of the products) and Thailand (belonging to the expanding circle of English-influenced countries) to see the process of “glocalization” and also to see how these countries’ TVCs differ from Filipino
TVCs. Our thought was that analysis of these products could be used as reference for future analysis.

Table 1: Brief summary of products in the analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Owner (parent company)</th>
<th>Product (company)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant Brands</td>
<td>Burger King</td>
<td>Burger King is one of the most successful fast-food brands in the world, selling burgers and side dishes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDonald’s</td>
<td>McDonald’s</td>
<td>The world’s largest fast-food brand, it sells many products from burgers to fries, fried chicken, ice cream, milkshakes, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yum! Brands</td>
<td>KFC</td>
<td>KFC is well known for its fried chicken, which is popular all over the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yum! Brands</td>
<td>Pizza Hut</td>
<td>Pizza Hut is a well-known brand for pizza. It also sells pasta and other dishes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To address the research questions and analyze the selected TVCs, we employed the concept of tri-stratal conceptualization of meta-functional analysis (Halliday 1978, as discussed by O’Halloran 2011). Much of the early cross-semiotic or multimodal work came together in the discussions on intercultural communication, social semiotics, and advertising. A wide variety of articles exploited this confluence of systemic-functional theory and socially oriented forms of linguistic, visual, audial and spatial analysis. “Social semiotics” (the title of Hodge and Kress's original book) became the rallying cry for those interested in analyzing aspects of texts that included but went beyond language. Social semiotics took discourse analysis beyond oppositions, which traditionally separated language-oriented research, Saussurean semiology, and sign-system-oriented semiotics. Semantic integration in multimodal phenomena may be viewed meta-functionally, whereby experiential, logical, interpersonal, and textual meaning interact across elements of word group and image.

Table 2: Tri-stratal conceptualization of multidimensional analysis of TVCs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>Consisting colors, images, and other visual representations of the product.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociolinguistic</td>
<td>Characters and sociocultural connections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic</td>
<td>The language used in the products, code choice, and position of words.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The processes and mechanisms of semantic expansion arising from inter-semiosis have yet to be fully theorized. It may be that inter-semiotic systems are required, beyond the sets of inter-related grammatical systems for each resource, operating as meta-grammars. These inter-semiotic systems would have the potential to link choices across hierarchical taxonomies for each resource, so that a group of words, for example, is re-semiotised as one component of a complex visual narrative, or vice versa. One major problem for multimodal discourse analysis is the complexity of both the inter-semiotic processes and resulting semantic space, particularly in dynamic texts (e.g., videos) and hypertexts (e.g., on the Internet). We separate the dynamic texts from the semantic space: i.e., sociolinguistic from linguistic features).

4. Findings and analysis

4.1 Globalization and intercultural representation: Burger King TVCs

4.1.1 The Philippines

In 1992, Burger King entered the Philippines as one of the leading brands in the fast-food industry. Their TVCs have always used yellow and red as a way of branding their company. This may be noticed in the company logo. Adeson and Bowan (2018) assert that it is a
popular theory that the use of red in their logos and around their stores revs up people’s appetites, making them more likely to enter the store and then buy more food. Men are the main characters in the TVCs, wearing the Burger King’s crown on their heads. Women appear less often. The characters often use jokes. This may relate to Filipino culture, with its positivity toward life (see Fang 2003) despite its challenges.

The characters in this TVC employ English and Tagalog simultaneously in their conversation. The Philippines is well-known as one of the two ESL countries in Southeast Asia. Filipino (Tagalog) and English are the two official languages, with seven regional languages also recognized. The Philippines has one of the densest concentrations of distinct languages in the world, and that linguistic tradition has helped shaped modern day Filipino (see Nolasco 2008). Codeswitching in TVCs reveals the richness of language, which may appeal to the local audience. See Figure 1 and Table 3.

![Image of TVC scene](image-url)

**Figure 1:** 2018 TVC (18 seconds). Character 1: *Kala ko. 69 pesos lang* (“I thought it's only 69 pesos”). Character 2: *Yes, 69 lang* (“yes, it's only 69”).

### Table 3: Summary of Burger King Philippines TVCs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>Yellow and red are the brand colors and also the TVC theme colors. The brand logo is shown often.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociolinguistic</td>
<td>Men are the main characters, to embody the “king”. The vivid and fun context represents Filipino culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic</td>
<td>Bilingual, employing both English and Tagalog.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**4.1.2 Thailand**

In 1994, Burger King entered Thailand as one of the most popular fast-food brands. The visualization they have expressed in most of their ads is how they cook their burgers. The flame-grilled burger is the main concept for Burger King Thailand. They put the flame in their ads over and over again to repeat to the audience how they cook. The use of red creates an appetite for food, which is why red has been used in the ads most often. The main actors are both male and female, of various ages. Burger King ads in Thailand tend to embody the concept of family. Thai culture is focused on family as Thai people call everyone in their lives one of their relatives (Hatthakit, 1999).

The sole language of the TVCs is Thai (with Thai subtitles). Most Thai people only speak Thai in their daily lives, so there is no point using English in the ads. However, the name of the brand is still English, as are the names on the menu. See Figure 2 and Table 4.
Table 4: Summary of Burger King Thailand TVCs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>Red is the brand color. A flame-grilled burger is shown often.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociolinguistic</td>
<td>The main characters are both male and female. The ads show intimacy between family members and also friendship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic</td>
<td>The language is only Thai, with Thai subtitles; however, the brand name and the entries on the menu are in English (codeswitching).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.3 United States

Burger King began in Florida in 1954. The company has been very successful building its brand with various product lines, especially burgers. Their Whoppers have been their best seller. The logo and ad colors remain consistent. Visualization focuses on an item from the menu. The focus is 100% on the food image, to make everyone have an appetite for the menu.

The Burger King mascot is the main character in almost every ad. Other actors have less importance. All attention is on the mascot. The prominence of its role shows how powerfully the mascot has represented the brand for decades. The language used is solely English. The dialogue is simple to ensure that it is easy to understand, mainly talking about the current

Figure 2: A flame-grilled burger is presented regularly, with a Thai subtitle meaning “ninja burger”.

Figure 3: The Burger King mascot appears regularly (14-second TVC).
promotion, to attract people’s attention. The food image and ingredients are the second and third most important items respectively. See Figure 3 and Table 5.

**Table 5:** Summary of Burger King USA TVCs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>The TVCs theme colors are blue, red and yellow. A food image is presented clearly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociolinguistic</td>
<td>The Burger King mascot is the main character.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic</td>
<td>The language is strictly English.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**4.2 Globalization and intercultural representation: McDonald’s TVCs**

**4.2.1 The Philippines**

McDonald’s entered in the Philippines in 1981. The brand has been very successful. It is one of the largest fast-food chains, with annual revenue of US$22.8 billion. The visuals in the TVCs all about friendship and family, in keeping with the Filipino notion of *pakikisama*: an interpersonal relationship where the people are friendly with each other, indicating basic human friendliness and affinity (Leoncini 2005). *Pakikisama* is important in private lives, public workplaces, and relationships with neighbors. Men are again the main characters in the TVCs. What is surprising is that the TVCs do not use both men and women, nor do they portray LGBT persons.

Tagalog is the main language in this TVC, though there are English subtitles. As explained earlier, the Philippines belongs to the second circle of English-speaking countries, with English being used as an official language; see (Friginal 2007). See Figure 4 and Table 6.

![Figure 4: A McDonald's TVC from the Philippines (13-second TVC).](image)

**Table 6:** Summary of McDonald’s TVCs in the Philippines.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>The brand color is red. Relationships between people happen because of McDonald’s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociolinguistic</td>
<td><em>pakikisama</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic</td>
<td>The spoken language is Tagalog, with English subtitles.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.2 Thailand
McDonald's, the world's largest chain fast-food chain, came to Thailand in 1985. Visualization in the TVCs makes use of multiple dimensions: blue and red colors and cartoons. Cartoon children are the primary characters and the concept is again family-oriented. In the Thai social system, children are seen as the family’s hope, to be protected in all circumstances (see Embree 1950 for a history of Thai social structure). Other cartoon characters also appear, including the Happy Meal character. The narration uses a child's voice. The TVCs focus heavily on advertising to children. The presentation of children is constantly adapted to the changing tastes of the Thai market (Jory 1999). Thai is the sole language used. Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia that was not colonized by an English-speaking country. See Figure 5 and Table 7.

Figure 5: Cartoon characters appear, along with the Happy Meal character. Note the Thai subtitle, meaning “holiday with Hotel Transylvania3” (16-second TVC).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>Cartoon characters can be seen. A food image is prominent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociolinguistic</td>
<td>Actors are rarely seen; the main characters are cartoon characters. A child’s voice provides the voiceover. The awareness of children as customers has been elevated over time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic</td>
<td>Thai (spoken language and subtitles), with some borrowed English words.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.3 United States
McDonald's was founded in the US in 1940 and has been expanding continuously since then. The visualization in the US TVCs is syntactically structured and straight to the point. The TVCs just show the food, with narration. They show how each menu item will be prepared, building an image in the customers' minds, making them remember the brand and menu. Characters, both male and female, are well represented.

The plot of this and other McDonald’s TVCs is based on a true story. The company chose to share its charitable projects to build awareness that the company has been helping society in a practical way, to win people's hearts. The commercial has two versions: the first in English and the other in Spanish, given the huge number of Spanish speakers in the US. The number of Spanish speakers was up to 41 million by 2015, representing 13% of the US population. It is not surprising why the company should make the Spanish ads (Ryan 2013). See Figure 6 and Table 8.
Table 8: Summary of McDonald’s USA TVCs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>The focus is on the food image as each menu item is deconstructed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociolinguistic</td>
<td>Actors are both male and female. The focus is on the dramatic story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic</td>
<td>Two versions of each TVC: one in English, the other in Spanish.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 Globalization and intercultural representation: KFC TVCs

4.3.1 The Philippines
KFC expanded to the Philippines in 1967 and established itself as a leading brand for fried chicken. Red is, again, an important color in the advertising, stimulating appetite for the food. White features in the outfit of Harland Sanders, the brand’s founder. Male actors dress up as Harland Sanders, demonstrated the founder’s continuing influence on the brand. Tagalog and English are both used in the TVCs, switching regularly between the two. That is normal in the Philippines where there are some people who can understand English or Tagalog and some who can understand both. The brand is aware of its audience and the people who do not understand English or Tagalog. There are subtitles in both languages, which also assists people with disabilities. See Figure 7 and Table 9.

Figure 6: Deconstruction of a sausage McMuffin (14-second TVC).

Figure 7: An actor dressed up as Harland Sanders; 14-second TVC.
Table 9: Summary of KFC TVCs in the Philippines.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>The colors of the brand are red and white. The food image plays a significant role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociolinguistic</td>
<td>Harland Sanders symbolizes the brand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic</td>
<td>TVCs are in Tagalog and English with subtitles in both languages.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3.2 Thailand
KFC came to Thailand in 1984. It is very popular among the Thai people due to its taste and affordability. The visualization hidden in almost every ad is that of hot and spicy flavor. KFC has adjusted its recipe to Thai tastes; however, the original recipe is still available. The dominant color in the TVCs is red, which has been used continuously over the years. Actors can be seen in almost every ad, even though there may be no direct dialogue, only a voiceover from a narrator. The language of both the subtitles and narration is Thai. See Figure 8 and Table 10.

![KFC ad with Thai subtitles](image)

**Figure 8:** KFC ad with Thai subtitles. The subtitle means “share the KFC spicy chicken pop bomb till February 27!”

Table 10: Summary of KFC TVCs in Thailand.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>The color of the brand is red. “Hot and spicy” is the key selling point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociolinguistic</td>
<td>There is diversity among the actors: men, women and children are used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic</td>
<td>The actors do not speak; instead there is a voiceover in Thai. There are Thai subtitles.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3.3 United States
KFC was founded by Harland Sanders in 1930. The brand went on to become the world's second-largest restaurant chain after McDonald's, according to sales. Its fried chicken is trendy in many countries. The visualization in the TVCs is all about the brand’s iconic image of Colonel Sanders with his bowtie and cane. White and red feature prominently. There are plenty of pictures of fried chicken. There are male and female actors. Facial expressions and eye contact are all about craving for fried chicken. The actors’ excitement for the menu is key to their performance. However, the number of actors in the TVCs has decreased in the latest TVCs, which often feature only an actor who dresses up as Colonel Sanders. His role is to present a new menu or new ingredient. A project called KFC Innovation Lab has been
introduced to make the menu look more interesting. There are no subtitles, and all language is English. See Figure 9 and Table 11.

![Image](image_url)  
Figure 9: A Colonel Sanders lookalike (US TVC).

### Table 11: Summary of US KFC TVCs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>White and red are prominent. The iconic image of the brand is Colonel Sanders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociolinguistic</td>
<td>A Colonel Sanders lookalike appears in almost every ad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic</td>
<td>The language is only English and no subtitles are used.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.4 Globalization and intercultural representation: Pizza Hut TVCs

#### 4.4.1 The Philippines

Pizza Hut, founded in 1985, is an American restaurant chain with branches all over the world. It is not clear when Pizza Hut arrived in the Philippines. The brand is very successful with its best-selling menu. Pizza Hut not only sells pizza but also pasta, side dishes, and desserts. More toppings and more cheese are a key selling point for Pizza Hut Philippines, along with the crunchiness of the crust: something noted very often in the TVCs.

The brand's color is red, to create an appetite for the food – in keeping with other food chains such as McDonald's and KFC. The TVCs include family, friends, and godparents. The family in Philippine culture is a nuclear one: a couple and their dependent children, regarded as the basic social unit. This pattern is inherited from the Spanish, who colonized the Philippines for over 300 years. The language of the TVCs is Tagalog more often than English. However, English can be seen in the subtitles, clarifying all the details.

The woman in this TVC demonstrates *mahiyahin,* meant to motivate and control a person's social behavior. A vast majority of Filipinos remain socially conservative. Everyone is expected to have *hiya* in the way they behave to win respect from the community. See Figure 10 and Table 12.
**Table 12: Summary of Pizza Hut TVCs in the Phillipines.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>The focus is on cheese melting, the amount of toppings, and the crunchiness of the crust. Red is the dominant color.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociolinguistic</td>
<td>Characters vary in age and gender. They may be shown in the household, in the office, or out with friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic</td>
<td>The spoken language is Tagalog, with English subtitles.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**4.4.2 Thailand**

There is likewise no record of when Pizza Hut expanded into Thailand. It is popular among Thais for its prices. The visualization of the TVCs is similar to the US TVCs in terms of color and focus on melting cheese. The characters are diverse, as is the content. A sense of humor is seen in almost every ad, in keeping with Thai culture. Both male and female actors appear. A few ads include children. The focus is on the promotion more than the product itself. Family, friendship, and other kinds of relationships appear in the TVCs constantly. Thai language is the only language used, as usual. Thai people tend to speak Thai in their daily lives even when they can speak other foreign languages. See Table 13.

**Table 13: Summary of Pizza Hut TVCs in Thailand.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>The focus is on cheese melting and the amount of toppings. Red is the dominant color.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociolinguistic</td>
<td>The content shows a sense of humor. Actors are both male and female. Family and friendship play a central role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic</td>
<td>The language is only spoken Thai.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**4.4.3 United States**

The brand is trendy in the US because of its reasonable prices. The visualization in the TVCs features red, the color of the brand. The hidden meaning behind the red is to build an appetite. Melting cheese is one of the brand’s key selling points. So cheese is shown melting to confirm the taste and the amount of cheese put into each pizza. The TVC actors vary in age and gender. The plots concern friendship, family, and sport. The TVCs bring a popular trend of the moment to people's attention. The actors’ performances are about excitement for that trend. Another key concept is fun and happiness. The actors involve Pizza Hut into their fun
and happy moments. In addition, English is the only language used. The ads show no awareness of foreign language speakers. See Table 14.

Table 14: Summary of US Pizza Hut TVCs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>The focus is on cheese melting and the amount of toppings. Red is the dominant color.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociolinguistic</td>
<td>The actors vary in age and gender. Family, friendship and sport are featured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic</td>
<td>The language is only spoken English.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Conclusion

The tri-stratal conceptualization of meaning was our guide in analyzing the TVCs selected for this study as we sought to explore “glocalization”, intercultural representation and identity. “Glocal” identities arise from the combination of global and local cultural contexts. The critical goal of advertising is to relate to the consumer frame of preferences to ensure the consumption of the brand or product. Each of the four Filipino TV commercials sampled related itself to the local culture in terms of family or history. The TVCs reflect the linguistic landscape of a multilingual country.

The present study makes several noteworthy contributions to intercultural communication in advertising by showing how "glocalization" enables global corporations to tailor their universal products to the local market and local corporations to match their local products to niche global markets (Berry 2013). Taken together, these findings suggest a role for "glocalization" and intercultural representation in TVCs in promoting a multi-layered perspective on communication. It is highly valuable to promote intercultural communication without ignoring the cultural norms of any one or another country. Research is needed to determine other aspects of advertising from an intercultural perspective: both the cultural sensitivity of international companies (so contextualizing this study) and "glocalization" of products from a local to an inner-local perspective.

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References


Intercultural Communication in Research Interviews: Accessing Information from Research Participants from Another Culture

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Abstract: Much research is done across cultural divides and necessarily relies on intercultural communication. However, existing practical guidelines for interviewing generally remain blind to the culture of the interviewer in relation to the interviewees. This affects the quantity and quality of the data collected from research participants who do not share the cultural or socio-economic background of the researcher. I address the implications of doing interviews that cross a cultural gap, showing how the researcher can step into the shoes of the Other and create cross-cutting ties. These practical solutions toward common pitfalls in intercultural research situations form a next step in reaction to a growing body of literature that critically reflects on how interviews are located in social contexts.

Keywords: cross-cultural research, intercultural interviews, communication with informants, social contextuality, data-collection strategies, qualitative methods, fieldwork, Othering.

1. Introduction

In the social sciences, information gathered largely comes to researchers through their research participants, who describe, explain and otherwise share their views and experiences. Interviews are by far the most widely used method to access this information (Holstein & Gubrium 1995:1). However, there are challenges to collecting and processing this type of data (Briggs 1986, Gubrium & Holstein 2002: ix, Lippke & Tanggaard 2014), and few researchers receive formal training in interviewing (Roulston, deMarrais & Lewis 2016). Nevertheless, “the validity of a great deal of what we believe to be true about human beings and the way they relate to one another hinges on the viability of the interview as a methodological strategy” (Briggs 1986:1). The quality of data gathered through interviews is even more vulnerable in the case of intercultural research situations, which are more prone to misinterpretations, especially when researchers, under the pressure to “publish or perish” (Nair 2018), engage in short-term field visits expecting to quickly grab information and leave again (so-called “shuttle research”).

As a social anthropologist and political scientist, I have engaged in years of ethnographic fieldwork, most prominently in the Netherlands, Germany, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Zimbabwe and South Africa (Wijngaarden 2010, 2012, 2016c, 2016a). Spending over two years in some of my fieldwork settings, I relied on a variety of interview approaches and techniques. When I engaged in fieldwork with research groups, including senior researchers and PhD students, I realized that some of the skills and strategies I used during intercultural encounters were fully foreign to them; and I repeatedly saw colleagues returning to camp empty-handed or with low quality data. In this article, I reveal some of the subconscious and seemingly natural processes underlying successful interviewing in intercultural research situations. These are strategies inspired by ethnography, selected to serve a wider body of researchers who wish to improve the quality of their collected data, but who cannot invest large amounts of extra time.

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Clearly, theoretical knowledge about doing interviews does not facilitate for many of the practical situations encountered in interviewing as a social engagement, which – as all other social interactions – is an embodied experience that includes emotions and performance (Goffman 1959, Ezzy 2010, Lippke & Tanggaard 2014). Due to limited resources, it may be impossible to accompany every researcher in the field to learn these skills, but practice can certainly be prepared for by sharing knowledge in writings. There is literature available from experienced researchers that helps to prepare interviewers for the field and improve the quality of the data they gather (Weiss 1995, Seidman 2006). However, these publications generally remain unconcerned with the practical aspects of crossing (sub-)cultural divides, which are present in many social scientific interviews.

Most researchers come from formally institutionalized, academic contexts and engage in highly modern lifestyles, while most research is executed outside this context. For their fieldwork, these researchers often move into (sub-)cultural spaces in which interpersonal interactions are guided by different logics than they are used to. Sometimes the cultural gaps are evident: for example, when an urban European researcher does fieldwork with First Nations people in the South American jungle; but, in our increasingly global world, sometimes part of the cultural or socioeconomic background the researcher is socialized in is shared with the participants, as can be the case when an upper-class Indian academic does research in the US, or research is focused upon minorities or long-term migrants within one’s own national boundaries.

I address the implications of doing interviews that cross a cultural gap, taking into account that some of these gaps can be defined as subcultural divides. As I originally come from a relatively urban European environment and most of my research took place in rural African contexts, the contents of this article are most relevant to researchers coming from so-called “Western” backgrounds, or from more industrialized or urban contexts, doing their fieldwork in more “non-Western”, rural or informal spaces, including those involving marginalized people, cultural minorities and migrants within their own nation.

Denzin (2001: 25) has noted an “increased resistance from minority groups to the interviews done by white university and governmental officials”. What he calls “modern interviews” are resisted by many of the majorities of non-Western territories, too, and interview practices need to be adapted in accordance, to allow a dialogue and productive co-construction of knowledge. A lot of the practices that are taught in university produce asymmetrical and colonial-type situations when applied in intercultural contexts. In a popular academic textbook, Weiss (1995: 79) advises to reveal as little about oneself as possible, at least until the end of the interview: “it is usually enough for the interviewer to give business card information – location and profession – along with the study’s aims and sponsorship”. Such a modern, individualist approach would be highly counterproductive in many research sites in the non-West, as well as with participants of the marginal subcultures I have worked with in Europe. Moreover, his conclusion that it is largely irrelevant if a researcher has a socioeconomic status that is much higher than the research participant, and that having a white ethnicity does not affect the interview (Weiss 1995:138–140), might be true in certain contexts; but this would be a very naïve assumption when engaging in fieldwork in the contexts that I am familiar with.

The challenge that often arises is that researchers may realize that the research participants whom they are encountering have a certain culture, but they are largely blind to their own culture, which, far from being the norm in the world, is quite specific and has a great influence on their thinking and approaches in the field. In this article, I do make generalizations, but this is not because the variety of (sub-)cultural contexts that researchers encounter in the field are similar. Rather it is because several patterns and commonalities can be found across academic researchers who, whatever their initial (cultural) background, have
been successfully socialized in a culture and position that are generally shaped by an extended
formal education, a certain level of wealth and connection with (highly) modern cultural
spaces – which, although finding varied expressions all over the world, also lead to certain
patterns.

This contribution is not meant to provide detailed descriptions of specific situations but
condense the practical workshops, briefings, feedback, demonstrations and instructions I have
offered, focusing on the main areas of difficulty I observed researchers encountering when
dealing with research participants from another (sub-)culture. Although every situation I
witnessed has been unique, I aim to provide insight in patterns that I observed during
interviews across different cultural contexts and emphasize valuable strategies to deal with
these recurring aspects.

First, I explain some insights in how to create a beneficial context for doing interviews
and strategies to deal with different types of research participants. Then I provide
observations on the interpretation of their answers. My conclusions focus on the fact that
intercultural engagements require one to step into the shoes of the Other, resulting in the
transformation of Self. My practical approach is guiding researchers how to achieve this in
practice.

2. A good interview?

When starting interviews at new field sites, often the answers collected do not reflect much of
the sentiments or insights of the research participants and only hit an official first layer of the
discourse present. A good example is how I interviewed Emmy (not her real name), a Maasai
lady who is slightly older than I, in the first weeks after my arrival in the village in Tanzania
where I did research about the imageries of the Other present in cultural tourism. Emmy
agreed to the interview, and my local translator and I took her out of the context of her
workspace, which is at an NGO that supported setting up a local community tourism
enterprise. Away from any colleagues and supervisors, and assuring her confidentiality and
anonymity, we asked her about her thoughts and experiences with tourists.

Emmy sat quietly and answered every question politely, looking down at the ground,
acknowledging how everything was good, how she was very happy to work at the camp, how
it helped her family and how she loved the tourists who are so interested in Maasai culture.
We both felt uncomfortable: she did because of all the questions, and I did because I felt like
an intruder who forced her into a position she did not want to be in. I tried to engage her in
small-talk about other subjects: told her about myself; explained my background and
objectives; and even softly pushed against some of her answers, asking for example if the
tourists really never did or said anything offensive (as she assured us) – but there was no use.
After half an hour of short, socially desirable answers, I gave up and thanked her for her help.
Even though my translator said that she answered “as she knows”, I was not convinced at all.

Months later, after I had become more integrated in the language and the village, Emmy
became a good acquaintance. Using the local language, she often entrusted me with
complaints about “white people” (including tourists) even while at work in the NGO’s camp,
elaborating on their rude behavior, the false believes they held about Maasai people, her
underpaid position, etc. My hunch with regard to the first interview turned out to be true. At
that time, she had had no idea if I could be trusted with sensitive information and
automatically assumed my loyalty, as a white outsider, to the Western tourists and NGO
workers who managed the tourism business.

When having only a limited time to do interviews in the field, one may not become
aware if the data collected is of low quality and may reach conclusions that do not correspond
with the realities in the field, especially in intercultural research settings. When research
participants are answering questions, their body position, facial expressions and tones of voice
are all indicators if they are speaking from their own points of view or stating answers with other intentions. If answers are short, in line with expectations, lacking detail, and without offering any voluntary information, the researcher should question how far the offered responses reflect the perspective of the research participant. As an ethnographer, I normally consider interviews that mostly contain these kinds of expressions as almost completely useless, because their reliability is doubtful. As in other types of conversations, indicators that “something is going on” can be laughing, switching languages, making eye contact with others, engaging in long silences, or giving answers that come very quickly: all of which possibly indicate a level of discomfort or even lack of sincerity on the part of the participant.

When engaging in interviews, researchers are often so focused upon their own goals that they forget their research participants’ objectives with the conversation. Participant’s intentions can be varied, and often more goals intersect. They might be interested in helping you, supporting the research goal, and answering your questions, but also in getting money or some other kind of gift/award, getting rid of you, not stirring anything up, expressing themselves, boosting ego, creating a certain kind of relationship with you, and pursuing all sorts of sociopolitical objectives. When interpreting and reacting to what is told, it may be important to scrutinize carefully the person’s position within the community and especially his position and relationship with regard to yourself, the organization you might represent, as well as other people within earshot. This is especially important in interviews that cross a (sub-)cultural gap, because here the researcher is unfamiliar with the local context and therefore much more vulnerable.

3. The context of the interview

When one accesses information through research participants, it is often one’s goal to understand the world through their eyes. Ethnography is an effective but time-intensive method to access these perspectives by physically engaging oneself in the activities and life(style) of the research participants, whilst recording one’s experiences. Another (and complimentary) method to access a people’s point of view is through asking them to vocalize their perspectives, which is often done through interviews. Over the past decades, it has become increasingly acknowledged that the activity of interviewing is itself an interactional social practice in which the researcher cannot remain distant and objective (Ezzy 2010). Both researcher and participant actively construct meanings, each partaking in the construction of the process and the resulting data (Holstein & Gubrium 1995, Lippke & Tanggaard 2014). When dealing with research participants, it is important to make an assessment of how we would be perceived through their eyes. Their image of us does often not coincide with our own interpretation of ourselves and may influence their behavior and speech when they are around us, especially when we address each other directly.

3.1 Preparations

There are several preparatory ways in which the researcher can soften a possible (sub-)cultural gap and thus ease interactions. The adaptation of dress is one of the clearest examples, often by modifying one’s style to agree with the customs and expectations of the people one is working with, including a sensitivity to age and gender variations. Sometimes this means covering knees, shoulders or head; sometimes it is important to have clothes that are clean and without any holes in them, even if the environmental context means it is difficult to wash clothes or keep them undamaged (for example, in extremely dry areas without roads and with lots of thorn bushes). It may be advisable to dress as simple and sober as possible as to not stand out, unless fancy dress is required to merge easily with the participants. However, it is of importance to feel comfortable and remain true to oneself, not overly mimicking the research participants when their style does not genuinely agree with
you. Instead, find a way to be yourself without being offensive or calling too much attention to yourself.

Second, it is advisable to spend as much time in the field as possible. Living as close to the participants as one can during the fieldwork has many advantages. It facilitates people becoming comfortable with your presence more quickly. Moreover, with the researcher experiencing more of the context, it becomes easier to formulate questions in a way that extracts the appropriate information and to interpret answers within their proper context. Shared experiences and cross-cutting ties build trust and can open participants to share more information with the researcher. In addition, they help the researcher to see the research participant in a multifaceted way and prevent Othering, in which the participant is perceived as having a fixed identity.

This means that contact and interactions that take place with participants outside the researcher’s prime identity as a researcher are normally beneficial. Always keeping appropriateness and the envisioned positive outcome in mind, this can for example be spurred by borrowing and lending cooking materials, sharing food, going to a place of worship together, sharing a trip to the market or shop, or having talks about issues that easily create recognition and resonance – such as family, shared aspects of spirituality, selected actualities in the news, and issues dealing with work(loads), study(loads), superiors or teachers. For women, experiences with so-called “women’s subjects” such as menstruation and pregnancy can enhance acceptance of and familiarity with the researcher. The idea is to think and talk about what one has in common with (some of) the potential research participants, at the same time sharing information about oneself, one’s life and one’s personality. Showing photos of one’s parents, siblings or children, playing or listening together to music that resonates with both parties, and giving attention to symbolic markers such as engagement or wedding rings, symbolic attributes or jewelry, etc., can all foster conversations with potential research participants, so one can become acquainted, leaving the researcher better connected or even sparking the start a friendship.

It is advisable to think over possible cross-cutting ties before leaving for the field and bring items such as photos, musical instruments, audio files, clothes, electronics, sports equipment, needlework, crafts, jewelry, etc., that one would like to share about. Some caution is important because the early stages of contact are fragile, and one has to carefully approach people, especially in ((sub-)cultural) contexts one is unfamiliar with, to prevent offending anyone, disqualifying oneself, or unwillingly associating oneself in a way that builds ties with one group at the expense of another. It is important to remain genuine because, beyond the moral implications, pretending to be someone else is not only uncomfortable but also can be sensed by (potential) participants and hinder evolving relationships and trust.

3.2 Greetings and a thank you
If an extended or close stay is impossible, there are several strategies that require low investment but do pay off. I do advise to always know the basics of the local language one works in; but, if this is impossible, the researcher should learn at least the appropriate way to greet people. This is of importance even if working with a translator, because it is generally beneficial to greet as many people as possible. Greeting is an important aspect of social interaction in many societies, helping to facilitate one’s reception by the community and kick-start small conversations that help to inform oneself about the context as well as integrate oneself and find potential research participants. Keep in mind that there may be different greetings and approaches used depending on your gender, age and marital status and those of the person you greet. For example, in Maasai I would greet adults who are not much older than I by calling out to them, even over large distances, using the appropriate address for their age group; and, when they respond, greeting them with Supai! (mostly for the men), or
*Taekwenye!* (mostly for the women), the plural of these terms being used when greeting more than one person. However, elderly people I would greet by walking all the way up to them silently, even if they are far away, and bowing my head so they can lay their hand on me.

Second, it pays off to know the right words in the local language, and also the gestures and body postures, to say “thank you”. Again, in many contexts, age and gender have to be observed. Sometimes eye contact is wanted, sometimes not. Sometimes a sincere word is enough; in other societies, a proper way of saying thank you is to stretch out and lie on the ground with folded hands. Even if the researcher does not pronounce or do everything perfectly, and even if he or she may be laughed at, in my experience, these types of efforts are normally highly appreciated. Even mistakes on the researcher’s part can create a more open atmosphere. Locals will feel more at ease to speak freely with the researcher, as someone who values and honors their (sub-)culture including their language, dialect or slang, trying to learn it instead of being an arrogant outsider.

Be sensitive to the fact that communities often have at least some negative experience with research projects. A lot of research is done by relatively wealthy researchers in relatively poor communities. Although researchers’ studies and careers would not be possible without the aid of local populations, too often researchers leave with the data without ever sending back the resulting reports and conclusions, and do not share copies of the photos and videos they made. Sharing of results and benefits should be as wide as possible, and especially communities in need should be adequately supported by researchers who benefit from them.

The only restriction should be that the research itself should not be obstructed by these compensations. For this reason, I advise researchers to refrain initially from individual gift giving, especially if the research is short and one is not integrated in the fieldwork community, unable to oversee the implications of these gifts. It is often more advisable to make a more substantial contribution that benefits the larger community at the end of the research or fieldwork period, in combination with a sharing of all the (visual) data collected with the people being depicted. If any personal gifts or payments are offered, it is of importance to find out what kind of gifts or amounts are appropriate and what is the right way to give them. In some societies, gifts are always offered with two hands, or with the one hand holding the arm that is offering the gift. In other societies, a gift simply needs to be left behind for the receiver to find it, without mentioning anything.

### 3.3 Flexibility in setting

A strategy of major importance is to undertake the interviews as much as possible in the relevant local context. Often this will mean visiting people in their homes; but sometimes it can also be at their jobs or by joining other activities, especially when these are relevant for the project: for example, during social gatherings or while engaging in hobbies. Observation of the context will give the researcher lots of background information and help him or her to relate to the participants, formulate questions and interpret answers. When I visit people at their homes, if I think the participant is enough at ease with this, I often ask if I can use the bathroom, because seeing more of their house can help to penetrate the “front stage” people may have put up and provide a wider impression of what people’s circumstances and daily life are like. This adds to the context of your research and can produce leads to ask questions and build cross-cutting ties.

Although they sometimes cannot be avoided, formal interview appointments are generally not the best. They can cause unnecessary formality and tension in participants and compromise an open sharing of thoughts. Unexpectedly dropping in, introducing oneself and asking if it is possible to ask some questions generally works well, except with people who live or work according to rigorous schedules or are deeply concerned about their privacy. Loose agreements to “come by” or visit on a certain day in the morning or afternoon generally
function better than working with a stringent calendar, allocating an inflexible half hour or hour for each interview. Although exceptions apply, generally a more social aura around the whole meeting is beneficial. A guideline is to mimic the way in which the people you are working with normally make appointments in their leisure time.

Counterintuitive to what most researchers seem to think, it is often unnecessary and even counterproductive for research participants to stop their other activities and sit down to focus only on the interview. Generally, people are more at ease talking about themselves and sharing their thoughts while they are doing a relatively simple activity. Whereas a blaring television or radio pulls attention away and incoming phone calls, work tasks or conversations with family or neighbors on other subjects can be obstructive, engaging in household tasks or crafts (laundry, cleaning, cooking, gardening, woodcutting, knitting etc.) can be perfect. It is important to make sure that the recording equipment captures all that is spoken clearly, even if some noise and movement is taking place.

Physical movement in the form of doing an activity or taking a walk together can often help to move along the conversation, too. A shared chore – for example, the researcher helping with chopping, planting or washing (when considered appropriate by the research participant) – quickly creates a familiarity that can greatly help the interview process. Moreover, the continuity of daily activities and even added help means that the participant does not lose his or her time because of the interview and can share with a more relaxed attitude. The fact that it is harder to take notes when engaging in shared activities is often worth the higher quantity and quality of the data collected, especially when audio recording.

3.4 Use of objects
The use of objects often proves quite beneficial in creating a more relaxed atmosphere and eliciting more elaborate explanations from the participant. This can range from holding objects such as a pen, stone, or stick when speaking to drawing something on a piece of paper or in the sand – or integrating objects that are purposefully chosen or created in advance by the researcher, to elicit a narrative or response (for example, objects of art, photos, or videos). In certain research contexts, it can be highly beneficial to ask the participant to select a few personal objects that have relevance for the subject discussed, such as clothes, pictures, tools, or foodstuffs, or to decide together to visit a place that is relevant for the project: for example, a village, natural site, grave, landmark, museum, or (not-too-busy) bar, etc., and do the interview there. Be aware that it is very important to determine the cultural appropriateness of visiting the envisioned site beforehand.

Cards are highly efficient in animating responses from participants. These can be used as an alternative to asking questions: for example, asking the participant to speak about the concept written on the card or sort short statements into piles, those that the participant agrees with, those the participant disagrees with, and others the participant is neutral on (a technique described in Spradley 1979). Subsequently or simultaneously, the cards are used as a stimulant for participants to explain their views. A more advanced sorting of cards takes place in the Q method (Shinebourne 2009, Watts & Stenner 2012): a mind-mapping technique in which cards with statements (or pictures or even musical fragments) are sorted according to a grid. I have found that even with illiterate participants, the holding and moving of the cards greatly enhances the length of responses and quality of explanations. With literate as well as illiterate participants, the playing of this “game” produces reliable and deeply insightful results, increasing the length of answers sometimes tenfold (Wijngaarden 2016b).

3.5 Audio recording
There is a lot of advantage to sound-recording interviews. Being able to revisit the recordings makes much more exact analysis possible. If translations are necessary, a professional translator can be hired to translate recordings and compare them to the translations obtained.
“live” through a translator in the field. When a researcher does not need to jot down everything being said, he or she has much more opportunity to create important rapport with the research participant by making eye contact, being attentive, and reacting to what is being said. Whilst recording, the researcher can still take notes regarding the circumstances of the interview, the context in which it is taking place, who is present, facial expressions, who says what, matters that need later discussion with the translator, noting down at what recording time points of high interest are being addressed so that these can be easily traced.

It has to be taken into account that a recording device can be considered invasive and unsettle participants. There may be circumstances in which recording is not possible. Even asking to record can break the fragile confidentiality and willingness to speak with the researcher. In this case, note taking has to be resorted to. However, if the researcher follows the recommendations listed above on how to approach research participants more generally, explains why the recording is requested and that one simply cannot write quick enough – underlining that the information is really of valued importance – this often helps participants over their initial hesitation. Once the recording is running, participants often forget about it and speak freely, so it is important not to place the recorders too obviously nor touch or look at them once they are on, unless necessary.

Experiences in the field have shown me that it still is of importance to underline that academic practice never allows researchers to record without asking permission and that it is important to make sure the participant has really understood what the recorder is and does. If participants ask you to delete or not to use something you have already recorded, it is of importance to listen to the reasons and comply, but when appropriate negotiate. I found that what is important for me to use and what is important for them to remain unmentioned are mostly slightly different things, and an agreement can be found that enhances instead of breaks down the relationship between me and my participants.

4. Approach to different types of research participants

Interviewees are not passive recipients but act upon and react to the researcher. A good example is mentioned by Sands and Krumer-Nevo (2006). They analyzed how interviewees regularly send shocks to researchers in resistance to being Othered, with the goal of negotiating a more equitable interview situation. Mostly, participants react to the researcher more subtly, which makes it even more important for researchers to be sensitive to recognizing this. As social beings, people often tend intuitively to phrase their point of view in a way that the receiver may connect with, understand or even agree with. If the difference in culture, social background, economic or symbolic status or gender is considerable in the eyes of a person, the framing of the message may increasingly move away from his or her personal perspective, to accommodate the receiver.

4.1 Perceived high status of the researcher

When a big gap is perceived between researcher and research participant, after agreeing to the interview, a research participant might find him- or herself unable to express his or her point of view, not being used to sharing his or her opinion in the face of someone who is deemed superior (according to local conceptions about gender, age, or social status). This more often manifests itself with youngsters and women who then behave shyly, simply remaining quiet or giggling, saying they “do not know”, or repeatedly referring you to their father or husband.

In these situations, a non-threatening and personal approach to the research participant can be beneficial. This means that the perceived gap in status is being de-emphasized and circumvented through the researcher’s behavior and approach. Most fundamentally, it is useful to think about how to phrase the researcher’s introduction and the objectives of the research in a way that makes sense to the person who is being interviewed. The use of jargon
or heavy terms would be counterproductive when dealing with a research participant who already considers him- or herself to be undereducated in relation to the researcher. The researcher has to try to place himself in the shoes of the research participant and ask in what way the research can be beneficial to this person or to his or her community.

This does not mean that a direct (material) interest to the participant has to be found if not obviously present; it can refer to the solving of a larger problem: for example, with regard to the environment or conflicts between different peoples; or a contribution to a moral goal: for example, intercultural understanding or furthered understanding of a certain phenomenon that can be handled better. Obviously, a genuine explanation has to be found that can be agreed upon and understood by both researcher and participant. Taking participants’ questions and concerns seriously can help towards decolonizing and indigenizing research efforts.

Regarding the introduction of the researcher, when working with people from a non-Western background or minority subculture, it is often advantageous to de-emphasize formal education and status without being dishonest. This can for example be done by omitting fancy designs of consent forms and shunning status-enhancing titles and expressions – for example, professor, PhD – as often as possible, instead using more general terms such as teacher, student, study and school. These are less intimidating and foster more opportunities to create bonds and understandings because they refer to experiences that are more likely to be shared. If necessary, it can help to reassure people that they will deal with questions that lie within their ability to answer: in other words, that they really are the experts you are looking for. It helps to position oneself as a student or child in the relative subject and locality of investigation, asking the participant to take on the role of teacher.

When constructing questions to be asked in interviews, the researcher has to consider reformulating the questions he or she has to make them understandable, relevant and engaging to the research participants. This often means not only changing the language – making it simple, short, to the point, without jargon or complicated terms – but, most importantly, imagining and immersing oneself as much as possible in the life experience of the research participants, translating the question in such a way that it evokes a response in the participants that is geared to what the researcher is, in fact, interested in. Often this means dividing up the original question in smaller parts and being extra careful that, in the process, the questions do not come to be reformulated in a suggestive way (implying a certain answer). They should remain open questions (not answerable by yes or no) as much as possible, because otherwise participants are likely to follow the lead of the researcher and only answer with single words. Sometimes, to prevent the question from being multifaceted or suggestive, a closed question can be used to initiate a second, open question that invites the participant to explain more. If a good rapport is present, often the second question does not even need to be asked, because the first question already invites a more extensive explanation.

A question such as “what are the socio-economic constraints your ethnic group is facing?” would probably not make sense to someone from a small village who has little formal education. It needs to be reworked into a series of smaller questions. Moreover, the researcher needs to use emic terms, which means words that are used locally, even if these concepts are considered politically incorrect in academic discourse. The goal is that the participant can relate to the question. In this example, the series of questions should be geared to find out what kinds of groups the participants distinguish in their locality, to which group they feel they belong, to which group others feel they belong, how daily livelihoods are secured by all groups, how relations between the different groups are, etc.

Examples of some of the questions could be: does it matter if you come from one group or the other? How do you live together in day-to-day life? In what ways are people from all these groups the same, and in what ways are they different in your eyes? Can you tell something about whether all these peoples are treated equally? Why is that? Can you explain
if it is difficult or easy to belong to your group? Can you give examples of things that are difficult? Can you give examples of things that are easy? How do your people generally make a living? Is the life of your children now easier than the life of your parents before, or has it become harder? How so? Are there ways in which you would like to improve your way of life?

4.2 Perceived high status of the participant

When approaching research participants who consider themselves of the same status and especially those who deem themselves higher in status than the researcher, a common challenge is not to get them to express their points of view but rather guide their focus so that the conversation can be beneficial for the research. Although these participants may express their perspectives freely and without constraint, they may also hijack the interview by choosing subjects they wish to speak about and easily divert from what is interesting for the researcher to hear. Although some very interesting information is collected serendipitously, at times redirection is necessary. When an appropriate moment for interrupting can be found, the participant can gently be guided back by asking another question. If he or she keeps drifting off too far, after acknowledging the value of what the person is saying or expressing appreciation for what he or she is sharing with you, it can pay off to stress politely what you have come for.

Even if participants look self-assured, it works best not to criticize them. Rather, connect to something that the participant said or did that is relevant to the researcher. For example, the interviewer could say, “you briefly mentioned… [insert reference to what participant said]. This is so interesting to me! Could you please explain more about this?” or “from your position as a village leader/elder. I am sure you may have a lot of knowledge about… [insert subject]/ encountered situations in which… [insert subject]. I would love to hear your insights/experiences about this.”

The higher the relative status of the participant or the greater the researcher’s familiarity with a participant, the less the researcher has to worry about contradicting the participant or asking suggestive questions. When the relationship is such that one is sure the participant will express disagreement, interviews that take the form of an exchange of thoughts or a discussion can be fruitful to expose information and considerations that the researcher might have been blind to. These often more advanced stages of doing research, which especially take place when a researcher revisits the field multiple times and shares his or her analysis, facilitate for more of a conversation between researcher and participant and a co-creation of research results that is in line with more of the principles of participatory approaches (Bergold & Thomas 2012).

4.3 Questioning the researcher

Toward the end of my interviews, I normally ask my participants if there is any question I forgot to ask. This is to give them the opportunity to share any information related to the subject that may have remained outside my focus or awareness but that, in the eyes of the participant, could be important with regard to the subject or otherwise of interest to me. Again, this is part of a more participatory approach open to the awareness that analysis of the phenomena being researched is likely to take place, at least to some extent, in cooperation with (insights from) participants.

Another approach that can be very useful is to ask if the participant has any questions he or she may want to ask the researcher. Giving the research participant space to ask questions can help to ensure that the research process is clear to the participant. This can include, for example, the institutional and theoretical background of the research, research clearance, ethical permissions, return to the field for reporting results, and benefits for participants and community. The questions asked by participants can help the researcher to build his or her
knowledge concerning the way participants view him or her, which is of importance when interpreting what he or she is told. In addition, turning around the roles can stimulate growth of the relationship between researcher and participant and decrease the gap between them. Finally, in interactions with shy or quiet participants – especially in groups – allowing oneself to be interrogated can put participants more at ease. I have often seen that, after this role switch, the conversation opens up and the researcher gets another chance to ask questions and receive answers relevant for the research. The interview continues, but now more in the form of a conversation. If participants are initially too shy to ask questions, it can help to start by volunteering personal information – for instance about one’s country and life – breaking the ice, tickling the trust and curiosity of the participants, before asking what else they would like to know.

Many researchers forget how their own position influences the answers obtained in interviews and assume themselves to be the neutral catalysts of responses. In reality, interviewing is a two-way exchange of information. The more reflexively aware the researcher is of what he or she looks like in the eyes of participants, the better he or she can understand what they communicate. In interviews that involve intercultural communication, this requires extra reflexive and empathic engagement to bridge the (perceived) gaps between researcher and participants and engage in meaningful data collection.

5. Conclusion

Interviewing is a social activity. Engaging in interviews implies having to deal with all the ins and outs of social interactions, including (perceived) gaps between researcher and participants in terms of culture, social status, economic position, gender, age, formal education or language. In this article, I have made researchers sensitive to perceiving these gaps from the perspective of their research participants. I have addressed the implications of doing interviews that cross (sub-)cultural gaps and provided tools to bridge or circumvent these gaps.

A growing body of literature reflects on how interviews are located in social contexts (Sands & Krumer-Nevo 2006:969). I responded by taking a next step, toward advising practically on how to deal with this realization. I adapted my experiences as an interviewer and ethnographer to provide insights that can be applied more widely by researchers from a variety of backgrounds who engage in interviewing across (sub-)cultural boundaries. I offered strategies by which researchers can encourage participants from different backgrounds to “speak their mind” and gently guide the conversation towards the required subjects. Most importantly, I challenged researchers to imagine themselves standing in the context or in the shoes of their research participants when approaching them and formulating questions, and to search for a variety of cross-cutting ties.

Underlying these practical recommendations is an attitude toward fieldwork that has grown from the ways in which being in the field has changed me. In my experience, in every society where you do research, you find a new part of your personality and identity and a new perspective on who you are. This is because through engaging with people from a new (sub-)culture, you become a different social person, and this changes your personality and dealings with people. Often, engaging in fieldwork means more than collecting data. It is exploring a possibly new but always genuine part of yourself: a way of framing, seeing and experiencing yourself that helps you to connect with your research participants, to recognize and understand them and to be recognized and understood by them. Inspired by Benjamin (1988) and Irigaray (2000), Ezzy (2010: 168) formulates it as:
An understanding of the dependence of Self on the Other for one’s sense of self.
Such openness to the Other is a gift—it allows Self to be transformed through
recognizing and validating the Other.

As a researcher you do not have to be or become the same as your research participants. In
fact, often you never can, nor would you want to. However, a deep and honest understanding
of the Other and his or her perspectives and experiences resides in the attempt to find that part
of yourself that resonates with this person.

The quality of research results is highly dependent upon the quality of data collected.
Methodologies can be designed appropriately and rigorously but, if they are not executed in a
dedicated and socially adequate way, the data gathered loses depth and reliability, and the
resulting analyses confuse the academic discussions rather than furthering them. If the data
we build upon is faulty or of low quality, all the work we do on that basis becomes deficient.
So much research is done that crosses (sub-)cultural divides without attention to what this
implies. With this article, I hope to make a contribution to improving researchers’
performance with regard to intercultural communication in the field.

About the author
Dr. Vanessa Wijngaarden holds cum laude BA and MA degrees in both political science
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