

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

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Revisiting Intercultural Communication Research

In the current era of mobility, web 2.0, mobile technology, diaspora, forced and voluntary travel, big-C Culture loses analytical purchase. It seems to become increasingly difficult to identify what Cultures are, who belongs to one of them and who does not, who has the right to claim membership in a Culture, who has not, or what effects Culture has on conviviality, multiculturalism and governance, among other questions. Scholars have attended to these questions by deploying concepts such as ‘cultural complexity’ (Hannerz 1992), ‘hybridity’ (Bhabha 1994), ‘network society’ (Castells 1996), ‘transculturality’ (Welsch 1999), ‘liquid modernity’ (Baumann 2000) or ‘superdiversity’ (Vertovec 2007). At least in the visibly multicultural societies of this world these questions concerning big-C Culture become pertinent not only for scholarship, but also for policymaking, media and communal life. In this volume we ask how such questions challenge intercultural communication, both its theory and its application.

For Blommaert and Rampton (2011) such challenges of superdiversity can be analytically captured by taking a ‘multi-scalar perspective of context’. Scales emphasise that the context and the processes of contextualisation, or indexicality, with which language users make meaning operate simultaneously on multiple, yet ordered, layers of normativity. Meaning is made both on ‘higher’ scales of institutional, abstract and imagined cultures, and on ‘lower’ scales of the immediate, concrete and perceived interactional reality (see also Blommaert 2007; 2010; Blommaert, Westinen and Leppänen 2015). The notion of scales brings these macro and micro contexts together into one analytical unit:

In a multi-scalar view of context, features that used to be treated separately as macro – social class, ethnicity, gender, generation etc – can now be seen operating at the most micro-level of interactional process, as resources that participants can draw upon when making sense of what’s going on in a communicative event. (Blommaert and Rampton 2011, 10)

In this volume we apply scales to the study of intercultural communication and thereby advance our understanding of how cultures get contextualised in communication as resources with which speakers communicate and negotiate meaning with each other. While not overlooking any ‘Cultural’ context when speakers interact, the chapters in this volume explore the possibilities of analysing multi-scalar contexts. We thus update intercultural communication research by advancing an improved theorisation of culture, which has traditionally been understood as a static context; as big-C Culture defined by determining where a speaker is from. This revisiting of intercultural communication is necessary, we argue, because research, as well as intercultural training and education, continues to take for granted a more or less fixed idea of culture, an assumption that any one speaker belongs to one culture and that they communicate according to the cultural norms they were socialised into, and thus are likely to miscommunicate in intercultural encounters. Even if such a view has been criticised from within the field of intercultural communication research (e.g. Sarangi 1994; Holliday 1999; Scollon and Scollon 2001; Ma 2004; Nakayama and Halualani 2010; Piller 2011; Sharifian and Jamarani 2013), it seems to remain the prevalent understanding especially for policy makers and intercultural educators in businesses and organisational fields.

Furthermore, the empirical examples shown in this volume demonstrate that interactants have certain amounts of control over the contextualisation of cultural elements and cultural difference. It seems they are not merely interacting in a way that is appropriate to ‘their’ cultural script, a kind of reflex to their socialisation, but they are creatively contextualising a multitude of cultural identifications, cultural differences and also cultural hybridity, which can each operate on higher and lower scales of argumentative power and meaning. Moreover they do this not statically, but

dynamically, emphasising, downplaying and erasing cultural contextualisation within any one interaction. In brief, they are interacting within a multi-scalar context, and they can creatively jump between various scales, or rescale, to negotiate meaning with their interlocutors.

In a similar way that interactants dynamically rescale culture in communication, the authors in this volume analytically re-scale the importance of big-C Culture in their empirical analysis of communicative fragments. As Arnaut et al. (2016, 6) note:

Well-established social categorisations are now being challenged [...] along with the macro-theories and models of society built around them, and in their place superdiversity calls for meso- and micro-scale accounts, focusing on lower levels of social organisation.

As succinctly captured in the title of this volume, we propose that researchers can begin attending to these challenges by ‘downscaling culture’ analytically: Culture might be, but also might not be, relevant in an interaction; culture needs to be contextualised and foregrounded by the interactants themselves. Thus, none of the authors in this volume take Culture for granted, rather they all explore culture as a multi-scalar and dynamic context that speakers have access to, even though this access is hierarchically structured, policed and subject to metacommunicative evaluation.

Despite this common perspective on multi-scalar contexts emergent in interactions, the chapters in this volume are thematically and methodologically heterogeneous, spanning a wide range of core themes in intercultural communication studies and doing so from a range of research traditions, including interactional sociolinguistics, critical geography, conversation analysis, critical discourse analysis, textual analysis, multimodal analysis and nexus analysis. Moreover, the authors of the chapters put forward different ideas of what it means to downscale culture analytically and how this can inform the analysis of speakers’ rescaling of culture. Thus, this volume presents a diversity of approaches for thinking about intercultural communication through the lens of scales, rather than formulating a research paradigm to be followed uncritically by future researchers. The editors hope that the collection of articles adequately depicts this open mentality and inspires the field of intercultural communication research to develop scales as one of its core analytical instruments.

Structure of the Book

The book is organised into three parts that are loosely grouped around different aspects of intercultural communication. The grouping is by no means definitive and several thematic, theoretical and methodological viewpoints connect the chapters with each other across the three parts.

Firstly, *Jaspal Naveel Singh* sets the tone in Chapter 2 by developing the concept of ‘downscaling culture’. By this he means an analytical downscaling to be followed by researchers, with an aim to attend to the members’ rescaling processes that occur in intercultural communication. His chapter offers the theoretical backdrop for the rest of the chapters comprising the book, and hopefully subsequent research. Furthermore, he opens up various methodological options for researchers who decide to apply a downscaled analysis of culture. By suggesting to critically consider aggregation, analytical stereotyping, small cultures and scales he marries concepts from communication studies, anthropology and geography. Without being prescriptive he invites researchers to put on their downscaling lenses when examining intercultural communication in order “to arrive at an understanding of culture and interculturality as emerging from people’s interactions rather than being fixed categories constructed by researchers for analytical purposes” (Singh, this volume, 11). Researchers in this volume adopt different methodological approaches to arrive at this downscaled understanding of culture and interculturality, carrying out—in the majority of cases—a micro-interactive analysis that enables them to examine culture not as a static, essentialist notion but as a dynamic process that is shaped by interaction. This does not mean though that big-C Culture characteristics do not manifest themselves in interaction; it is indeed their presence that enables researchers to challenge both their legitimacy in and their relevance to a given interaction. In that sense, as Singh concludes, a downscaled approach to intercultural communication is situated within the critical study of power.

Part I: Forming Small Cultures

In the first part Argyro Kantara, Marta Wilczek-Watson, Mabel Victoria, and Mariana Lazzaro-Salazar examine encounters of intercultural communication that have ‘traditionally’ been viewed as potential sites of miscommunication, because of the interactants’ different cultural backgrounds. By adopting a downscaled perspective and carrying out micro-analyses of participants’ talk-in-interaction all four

authors invite us to rethink intercultural (mis)communication in, at least, two ways. Firstly, by examining culture not as a static notion but as a product of the unfolding interaction, they challenge essentialist conceptions of culture and instead regard culture as a collaborative interactional process. In this light, all four authors not only challenge the widely held assumption that culture is the reason behind any potential miscommunication in intercultural encounters, but also invite us to rethink what culture is. Secondly, by describing the formation of a small or ‘third’ culture as created by the participants themselves all four authors play with perceived notions of cultural differences, indicating that even if these are made relevant by participants in the interaction, they empower rather than disempower people. Their research covers a range of intercultural encounters, spanning from interactions between housemates (Kantara), to couples (Wilczek-Watson), to employment seekers (Victoria), to professional colleagues (Lazzaro-Salazar).

Argyro Kantara in Chapter 3 employs conversation analysis to inform discussions about culture as interaction-making processes in everyday conversations in English as a Lingua Franca among international students who share a house in Britain. By applying a downscaled analytical perspective she examines the housemates’ talk at a micro level, tracing any instances of first-language sociolinguistic transfer participants exhibit. She then discusses how these transfers, instead of creating communication problems, are used collaboratively by all interactants to create a common ‘third culture’ at a mezzo level. Finally, by applying an upscaled analytical perspective, she argues that her findings challenge macro-level assumptions about culture, as interactants make culture that does not necessarily mirror big-C Culture characteristics.

Marta Wilczek-Watson in Chapter 4 examines how transnational couples’ food-related interactions index their positioning towards their own and their partner’s sociocultural fields. At the same time they create ‘third spaces’—liminal zones with unique cultural meanings that are neither fixed nor united. By applying a downscaled perspective she examines how these transnational couples ‘downplay’ the ideas of culture and cultural difference through their displays of cultural similarity, hybridity and cosmopolitanism. She argues that these practices highlight the relativity of the concept of culture and that the couples’ hybridity does not create a clash but on the contrary indicates that culture undergoes continuous re-scaling.

Mabel Victoria in Chapter 5 addresses two issues that have not received much attention in intercultural communication studies so far: how humour can be employed by participants in intercultural encounters to resolve miscommunications and what happens *after* the miscommunication episode. By applying a downscaled analytical perspective, she exemplifies how participants in her dataset used their cultural differences in order to turn miscommunication episodes into productive sites for negotiating relationships. In this sense her research, in a similar way to the previous two studies in the first part, indicates that cultural differences actually empower rather than disempower interactants.

Finally, *Mariana Lazzaro-Salazar* in Chapter 6 examines the workings of a community of practice comprising professionals (nurses) from different national and ethnic backgrounds. By adopting a downscaled perspective she examines the cultural aspects that define this group of professionals through their display of a shared set of beliefs, discursive practices and ways of doing things. These reflections and negotiations of professional practice, she argues, indicate how this group of nurses constructs multiple alignments at local and higher community scales that in turn help them build their professional accountability. Her research, in a similar way as the previous three authors’ studies, highlights the way interactants move between different—in her case professional—scales in order to build and make sense of both their small culture and the larger professional community they belong to.

Part II: Managing Intercultural Education

In the second part, Adam Wood, Christian Abello-Contesse and María Dolores López-Jiménez, Shobha Satyanath and Richa Sharma, and Mina Kheirkhah examine intercultural communication as exhibited in another ‘traditional’ area in the field—that of education. Education for these authors is a wide term and is used to discuss various issues, from the spatiotemporal organisation of a school (Wood), to language maintenance and change in families (Kheirkhah) and across families (Satyanath and Sharma), to educational materials (Abello-Contesse and López-Jiménez). The authors in the second part use different theoretical and methodological approaches in order to examine the multifaceted nature of intercultural education, yet they all take a downscaled perspective of culture as their core analytical and argumentative focus. Although authors in this part, compared to the ones in the first part, do not all pay the same level of attention to instances of micro-communication, they do challenge established notions related to education, inviting us to perform continuous analytical re-scaling and to rethink the way we view intercultural education.

Adam Wood in Chapter 7 examines how school as a thing (i.e. as a physical space) is dependent on how the process of school (i.e. its curriculum, timetable) comes about and is communicated. He argues that using scales—a range of differing aggregations and revelations of detail—and the movement between scales to juxtapose different kinds of knowledge about schools when talking about them reveals the rich and varied activities that make a school. In other words, using different lenses to view and talk about schools may shed light on what school is and how it comes to be.

Christian Abello-Contesse and *María Dolores López-Jiménez* in Chapter 8 analyse and evaluate the content of 10 textbooks that are being used to teach English as a foreign language (EFL) at Spanish-English bilingual schools in Andalusia, Spain as part of the *Bilingual Schools* programme within the broader *Multilingualism Promotion Programme* introduced in the region in 2005. By connecting the official, institutional objective of intercultural education attached to the programme with the descriptive background put forth by recent approaches regarding the relationship between ‘language and culture’ in foreign/second language teaching, their findings indicate that the intercultural content of the textbooks examined is unlikely to promote students’ intercultural understanding, challenging thus both the way intercultural content and the aspired students’ intercultural competence are dealt with in these textbooks.

Shobha Satyanath and *Richa Sharma* in Chapter 9 examine the growth of English in Delhi in the last century. This chapter presents findings from an extensive ethnographic survey of 71 families, mapping language changes over four generations. The authors argue that rather than being used in a monolingual way in clearly-bounded spheres of life, the reality is that English hybrids mixed with local dialects are the norm today in most contexts in the city. This shift is closely tied to changes in the educational system in Delhi, and is grounds for a re-examination of the status of Indian varieties of English as ‘non-native’.

Lastly, on a micro-communication level, *Mina Kheirkhah* in Chapter 10 explores language socialisation patterns in a trilingual family (Kurdish, Persian and Swedish) in Sweden. In her ethnographic study, she shows how different scales are invoked during family interactions both by the parents and children, and how a change in strategies leads to a change in the family language policy. During the time she observed the family, the younger child’s resistance towards using the parents’ heritage languages in the home transforms the interactional context of the family interactions.

Part III: Mediated Encounters

The third and final part resonates with the first in terms of the micro-analytical approaches used. In this section, *Harriet Lloyd*, *Elina Westinen*, *Yannik Porsché*, and *Dorottya Cserző* present further views on how scales can be operationalised in research. These chapters examine different media, but they all pay close attention to the interplay of the affordances provided by the specific medium (be that mass- or social media, or personal videochat) and the agendas of the various participants. Culture is discussed in terms of how it is constructed in mediated encounters and how this in turn influences charitable giving (*Lloyd*), or how it is co-constructed through the use of irony in social media posts (*Westinen*). The two final chapters in this section directly address how micro-analysis can be used to achieve downscaling in practice in the context of public representations of immigrants (*Porsché*), and video-mediated communication (*Cserző*).

Harriet Lloyd in Chapter 11 explores the relationships between pity, mass media, and scales of proximity in charitable giving. Her research is based on an analysis of Britain’s ‘Children in Need’ 2011 telethon as well as focus-group data collected in the weeks after the programme was broadcast. She suggests that due to the influence of the mass media, physical proximity is no longer strongly linked to how well certain groups can be known, and therefore included in charitable actions. This directly impacts which groups are seen as deserving of charitable intervention.

Elina Westinen in Chapter 12 examines the scales which are activated in social media posts by two Black Finnish rap artists. Her multimodal analysis discusses themes of othering, globalisation, nationalism, and immigration. She argues that through the use of irony (often arising from the contrast of meaning across the different modes of the visual and the textual) these artists simultaneously navigate discourses of ethnic discrimination and tolerance. These complex social-media posts exemplify the multiple voices currently existing in Finnish society.

Yannik Porsché in Chapter 13 addresses a conflict central to downscaling culture: how can the researcher avoid analytic essentialism (taking culture as a given) while at the same time analysing the way members refer to cultures? He suggests that one solution is to take an empirical micro-analytic approach of contextualisation in interaction. He then illustrates how this method can be used through an example of mass media interaction in a case study of public representations of immigrants in a bi-national museum exhibition.

Finally, *Dorottya Cserző* in Chapter 14 argues that combining the concept of scales with the framework of nexus analysis is a practical way to achieve downscaling, which she demonstrates through her analysis of recorded videochat interviews. She starts with a multi modal micro-analysis of chosen excerpts and then considers how the larger scales, such as the interpersonal relationships and the goals of the interview, influence the interaction. The videochat interview is treated as a 'site of engagement', where different practices or scales (such as chatting to a friend, interviewing, and using videochat) intersect.

The final commentary by *Tereza Spilioti* and *Korina Giaxoglou* assess the implications of combining scales and intercultural communication research. In order to guarantee an independent and critical reflection on this topic, the editors did not have the commentary available at the time of writing this introduction.

The 14 chapters in this volume present unique perspectives on intercultural communication, both theoretically and empirically. Employing the notion of scales, and the idea of downscaling culture in particular, allows for formulating fecund methodological avenues into researching the new challenges contemporary globalisation poses for understanding culture and interculturality. We hope readers find this volume helpful for thinking about and developing their studies and research.

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