

CHAPTER TWO

THE JOURNEY IS ITS OWN REWARD: DOWNSCALING CULTURE IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION RESEARCH*

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Abstract

This chapter presents a methodological review of the literature on scales and intercultural communication. It proposes to downscale culture analytically for research to be able to attend to the rescaling processes that occur in intercultural communication. I review four concepts, aggregation, analytical stereotyping, small culture and scales, 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. The notion of downscaling culture pushes the study of intercultural communication towards analysing the micro-interactional moves speakers make in a given interaction, without necessarily seeing these speakers as belonging to a predetermined (national) Culture and their interactions as being necessarily influenced by this Culture. The chapter thus follows anti-essentialist trends in discourse and communication studies and thereby also situates intercultural communication research within the critical study of power.

Keywords: Scales, Nation, Anti-essentialism, Small cultures, Micro-macro

1. Introduction

This chapter puts forward a downscaled understanding of culture in intercultural communication research. By that I mean that I challenge an understanding of culture as a 'fixed macro context' in which communication occurs and is measured against. I acknowledge instead that the contemporary moment of globalisation, in which intercultural communication becomes the norm for many speakers (Baraldi 2006; Sharifian and Jamarani 2013; Canagarajah 2013), requires us to understand culture as a 'multi-scalar context' (Blommaert 2010; Bommaert and Rampton 2011). To address communication in multi-scalar contexts, I suggest, we need to downscale culture analytically, i.e. research needs to push the fine-grained analysis of interactional processes (such as upscaling, downscaling, outscaling, rescaling) that occur in instances of intercultural communication. This forces us to leave behind so-called big-C Cultures as analytical *a priori* categories of belonging (see also Blommaert 2015a) and instead attend to small-culture formation (Holliday 1999). The notion of scales is thus employed in a double sense in this volume: first, to refer to the 'multi-scalar contextualisation processes in communication' that interactants draw on as a communicative resource, and secondly, to inform an 'epistemological perspective in research' that academics can take when studying such processes. The chapters in the present volume show that such a double employment of scales is especially relevant for analysing intercultural communication.

There are broadly speaking two types of studies of intercultural communication: specialist academic research and more popular advice literature and training. While this volume situates itself firmly in the academic field, it is important to note that the two types of intercultural communication research represent a continuum rather than two separate categories, and they also influence one another. On the one hand, more popular types, such as guide books for travellers or training for multinational business organisations, base their advice on academic findings, on the other, academic researchers often discuss the impact their findings can have for a more just society, smoother business, better policies or personal development (for a critical overview of these reciprocal links, see Sorrells 2012). Given this potential for application in real-life situations, I believe it is necessary that the study of intercultural communication updates itself to take into account contemporary globalised life modes that question the fixity of culture and acknowledge its multi-scalarity. This chapter critically reviews four concepts that have

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been introduced in various strands of academic intercultural communication research: aggregation, analytical stereotyping, small cultures and scales. I conclude by suggesting that analytical downscaling can be productively developed as a first step in analysing intercultural communication.

Nevertheless, this chapter is not meant to put forward a finished system or programme for analysis. Rather it should be regarded as a first methodological review to introduce the notion of scales into intercultural communication research. In preparation for this volume, the editors circulated an earlier draft of this chapter among the authors and they were asked to critically engage with the ideas developed here. Readers are invited to do the same. I hope that our collaborative efforts to make sense of the complexities around scales, multi-scalarity and processes of downscaling, upscaling and rescaling, both as a communicative resource and as an analytical perspective, can make an impact for the study as well as the politics, economies and identities of intercultural communication in the early twenty-first century.

2. Aggregation

The study of intercultural communication is primarily concerned with analysing communication rather than culture, and traditionally culture is frequently conceptualised simplistically in national terms. For instance, Hofstede's influential cross-cultural study *Culture's Consequences* (1980) surveys employees in multinational organisations in 40 nations (newer versions of this study can be found in Hofstede 2001; Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov 2010). Hofstede uses questionnaires to elicit cultural values along four dimensions: individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance and masculinity-femininity. He collected data from over 100,000 employees from around the world, surveying their attitudes to these dimensions on a five-point Likert scale. This yielded individual-level data, which Hofstede, using statistical methods such as cluster analysis, correlations, and factor analysis, interprets as indicators for culture-level (i.e. nation-level) characteristics. Hofstede could then rank the 40 nations as having more or less of each of the dimensions. For instance for the individualism-collectivism dimension, the study shows that Canada (rank 4) is more individualistic than Chile (rank 33), but less than the USA (rank 1) (Hofstede 1980, 222). In a similar fashion Hall (1976) classifies cultures along lines of high and low context communication. Hall's study reveals that for example Chinese speakers code less information into their speech (low context communication) than Swiss-German speakers do (high context communication) (Hall 1976, 91).

There are two things I would like to highlight here. First, the labels given to cultures are problematic. Hofstede (1980, 11) is consistent in using labels of national political entities in which he gathered the data, without accounting for the particular region in that nation the respondents came from or the language they spoke natively. Hall's (1976) labels seem to operate on various analytical scales, we find subnational labels like 'African-American' and 'Native-American', national labels like 'American', 'Chinese' or 'Greek' and supranational labels like 'Arab', 'Scandinavian' and 'Latin'. It is not clear whether Hall uses these labels to describe the cultural background of the respondent or the language the person speaks natively, or both.

The second point, and the more important point for the present volume, is that culture is understood here as a sum total—as an 'aggregate'—of the individual respondents. Individual responses are counted, coded and grouped and then re-labelled and aggregated in abstract macro-terms. Smith, Peterson and Thomas (2008) in the introduction to their *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Management Research* describe how organisational scholars working in Hofstede's and Hall's traditions translate individual-level observations to nation-level characterisations. First, values and beliefs are surveyed on the individual level. Then, the individual-level value tokens are grouped into clusters which are given certain labels such as benevolence, hedonism or achievement. In a third step, these clusters are aggregated to the nation level to yield value types such as hierarchy, harmony, egalitarian commitment and so on (Smith, Peterson and Thomas 2008, 6–7). These analytical steps always involve a quantitative clustering, when researchers count how frequently, or how prominently, or to what degree, a certain value token occurs across the data and how these tokens cluster. Then, researchers endow this cluster with a qualitative label to characterise it. In the final step, the labelled cluster is aggregated to a higher-level value type, such as a nation, for better cross-cultural comparability. Aggregation is thus a mixed-method upscaling strategy, combining common and well-established quantitative and qualitative analytical methods to ensure scientific reliability, validity and impact.

Although scholars often provide disclaimers to avoid absoluteness when writing about the values of a specific culture, and sometimes report that aggregations are problematic and contradictory (Smith, Peterson and Thomas 2008, 7), and although critical research has pointed out that aggregations contribute to the essentialisation of culture (Ma 2004; Baraldi 2006; Halualani and Nakayama 2010; Wagener 2012; Hua 2014; Dervin and Machart 2015), aggregation is a common practice in social science research. By using abstract macro-labels of nations, researchers can operate with an etic terminology that is valid across the globe and is thus better suited to guarantee comparability (Hofstede 1980, 40–42). This national label is, as Hofstede (1980, 14) knows, a "construct" that does not exist, but that "[w]e define [...] into existence" for analytical purposes. Baskerville (2003) therefore suggests that Hofstede did not actually study culture, at least not in an anthropological and sociological sense, but

rather studied well-quantifiable socioeconomic features. This has consequences for the more popular uptake of such intercultural communication research. Holliday, Hyde and Kullmann (2004, 146) note that although researchers like Hofstede define these nation-level aggregations as constructs, they “are interpreted as ‘facts’ by writers of the numerous popular guides for those visiting, living in and working in ‘foreign’ cultural contexts”. Even more unwaveringly, Piller (2011, 73) declares that a “large segment of the intercultural communication advice literature is nothing more than an instantiation of banally national ways of seeing”. In line with these critical approaches, it is the systematic deconstruction of abstract macro-aggregations as facts that interests us in this volume, and we attempt to advance our critical agenda by developing the concept of scales. In particular this volume suggests that intercultural communication has to analytically downscale big-C Cultures and attend to the micro-interactive processes that emerge in communication.

3. Analytical Stereotyping

Scollon and Scollon (2001, 167–74) argue that aggregation in intercultural communication research becomes problematic in the ideological process of stereotyping: when aggregation is reified and essentialised, when it becomes characteristic for a whole culture. Holliday (1999, 241–42) writes:

In the case of culture, reification takes place where the notion of culture has been constructed for the purposes of explaining human behaviour, but is then institutionalized into something that exists over and above human behaviour.

Through reification culture begins to exist beyond purely analytical purposes. Culture becomes a “causative agent” (Keesing 1981, 72) or a “*deus ex machina*” (Bond, Žegarac and Spencer-Oatey 2000, 50) that explains communication in intercultural settings. And crucially, it is not only culture that becomes an explaining agent but also the very notion of interculturality itself, i.e. the imagination that there exists a difference between cultures and that this difference plays out in communication. Sarangi (1994, 413) calls such ideological processes ‘analytical stereotyping’: “analysts operate with a prior definition of the situation and the participants as (inter)cultural and subsequently play upon a principal of cultural difference in accounting for instances of miscommunication”. This process runs the risk of being circular: “If we define, prior to analysis, an intercultural context in terms of ‘cultural’ attributes of the participants, then it is very likely that any miscommunication [...] is identified and subsequently explained on the basis of ‘cultural difference’” (Sarangi 1994, 414). Sarangi’s anti-essentialist perspective critiques that misunderstandings in intercultural communication are seen as manifestations of the difference in norms, expectations, values, beliefs of the interlocutors, and that these are caused by the differences of the cultures the interactants are said to belong to.

It should be noted that such critiques of essentialisation are targeted against researchers, not against speakers, although the anti-essentialist perspective can raise awareness of stereotyping in communities. In everyday intercultural communication speakers often engage in such stereotyping and essentialisation for making arguments and it is not the purpose of this volume to criticise or judge such members’ categories. Researchers, however, do not have to replicate this stereotyping for their own arguments (on this point, see Hartog 2006, 176; Piller 2011, 68). Thus we have to differentiate between members’ communicative stereotyping, a rhetoric of speech, and researchers’ analytical stereotyping, a methodological perspective. However, I acknowledge that both processes are processes of stereotyping, and I believe it is the responsibility of intercultural communication researchers to become aware of their own analytical stereotyping, and possibly find ways to avoid it. To achieve this reflexivity I propose to attend to Holliday’s small-culture formation.

4. Small Cultures

Sarangi’s anti-essentialist proposal is echoed in Holliday’s (1999) notion of ‘small cultures’ (see Holliday 2011; 2013 for newer accounts and a formulation of a tentative “grammar of culture”). The turn towards small cultures critiques the aggregationist, categorisational and character-lending trends of constructing large cultures, or big-C Cultures, for explanatory force. Such a shift was certainly already articulated in the 1980s, for instance in the pioneering work of Gumperz (1982) and Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz (1982) on contextualisation cues and interethnic communication in professional settings. Yet, Holliday’s small-culture formation makes explicit that large cultures are predominantly consequences of stereotyping and essentialism. Large cultures are groups of people that are said to have specific characteristics, and these characteristics are said to be different from the characteristics of another group of people, or another people in another nation. Hence, the characteristics operate on an etic macro-scale of the nation that allows the characteristics to be compared with each other and taken as explanations for intercultural (mis)communication. In contrast to large cultures, small cultures are local communities, groups, milieus, families, professions, communities of practice, which are analysed without constructing a macro-context like nation or language community (for a related discussion of “thick” vs. “light” communities, see Blommaert and Varis 2015, 54–57). Small-culture analysis focuses on the ways in which

participants themselves invoke cultural values at different times in an interaction and renegotiate meaning of such values (see also Lazzaro-Salazar, this volume). Instead of understanding culture as a fixed macro context and a static attribute of a speaker or a group, the small-culture formation understands culture as a “dynamic, ongoing group process which operates in changing circumstances to enable group members to make sense of and operate meaningfully within these circumstances” (Holliday 1999, 248). As discussed in more detail further down, this negotiation is achieved through the members’ communicative resources of scaling.

The use of the adjectives “small” and “large” might be slightly misleading, as small cultures can be quite large in size and population and large cultures can be quite small. Rather than referring to the size of the culture under investigation, large and small cultures refer to opposing methodological perspectives. The large-culture perspective posits an entity that does not exist empirically, and then regards every other entity in the analysis as related to this posited entity, either being sub- or superordinate entities—like an onion skin, to use Holliday’s metaphor. The small-culture perspective, in contrast, is concerned with exploring how speakers deploy culture in a given interaction and how culture emerges as a communicative resource. Holliday (1999, 240) therefore stresses: “‘Small’ is not a matter of size but of the degree of imposition on reality”. I suggest that the notion of downscaling culture, and an appreciation that social and cultural reality is multi-scalar, can make small cultures analytically visible as it pushes researchers to tolerate a weaker imposition on reality (see also Satyanath and Sharma, this volume; Abello-Contesse and López-Jiménez, this volume). The realness a large culture is said to have analytically, its agency in determining cultural reality, can be challenged when we begin analysis at speakers’ communicative resources and then find routes to understanding their cultural production in interaction that go beyond assigning to speakers *a priori* demographic categories of belonging and nationhood.

5. Scales

In social-science and sociolinguistic research scales are used mainly as quantitative measurements of social actions. For instance, there are nominal scales, ordinal scales, interval scales and ratio scales which all order events along a continuum (Howell 1999, 16–20). Scales imply quantification, measurement and correlation. And they entail difference; a pivotal concept also in understanding intercultural communication. Difference manifests for instance in sociolinguistic variation across space, across social classes or across time and more generally it manifests in social distinction (Bourdieu 1984; 1991; Irvine 2001). As also critically discussed in Blommaert and Dong (2010, 367–68), sociolinguistics usually describes difference across space as ‘horizontal variation’ and difference across the social hierarchy of classes as ‘vertical variation’ (e.g. Labov 1972, 143; McConnell 1997, 351–52). However, these are labels that are already imbued with analytical stereotyping. Neither horizontal nor vertical variation can be represented on ordinal, interval or ratio scales, where tokens have an inherent higher or lower value, but they can only be represented on ‘nominal scales’, where values are assigned arbitrarily and have no inherent higher or lower value. For instance, horizontal tokens such as ‘British English variant = 1’, ‘Nigerian English variant = 2’, and so forth, have arbitrarily assigned values on a nominal scale. Equally, the so-called vertical variation of the hierarchy of social classes can only be represented on nominal scales, such as ‘working class = 1’, ‘lower-middle class = 2’ and so forth. For the purposes of this chapter, I thus understand both types of variation as horizontal, representable only on nominal scales, as they both refer to processes of arbitrary social differentiation that have no inherent lower or higher value.

Eliminating the vertical dimension from the arbitrary assignment of values leaves room to understand vertical difference as a scaled micro-macro dimension. Kell (2013, 5) identifies such an understanding of vertical difference as the central methodological problem of scales: “how to move from the micro to the macro, how to make that analytical move in order to be able to explain larger and more abstracted phenomena from the basis of data of unique instances of communication”. Kell’s (2013; see also 2009) discussion advances a methodological reflexivity, in that it attempts to recognise the analytical moves researchers make to connect the micro and the macro. It critically investigates the aggregating moves of research, where an interplay of analytical steps, quantitative ones (distributions, clusters) and qualitative ones (re-labelling and characterisations), connect individual-level value tokens with higher-level value types. Such methodological reflexivity, she argues, situates research on scales in the middle ground between strictly text-based approaches like conversation analysis and approaches that include more portable identities and predetermined categories like critical discourse analysis.

Blommaert’s (2007; 2010; 2015b; Blommaert, Collins and Slembrouck 2005; Blommaert, Westinen and Leppänen 2015; see also papers in Collins, Slembrouck and Baynham 2009) work on scales presents us with a well-formulated entry point for studying the linguistic and communicative processes in both the vertical micro-macro dimension and the horizontal dimension of social differentiation. In contrast to Kell’s understanding of scales as methodological reflexivity, Blommaert investigates scales from the members’ perspective. However, this has methodological implications. Blommaert (2010, 5–6) understands sociolinguistics in the contemporary globalised era as being primarily concerned with analysing the vertical dimension. He argues that every horizontal difference of spatial and temporal variation should be analysed also as layered and hierarchically ordered along the vertical dimension. Speakers in their interactions display specifically valued orientations to communicative

resources that come from elsewhere. For instance, speakers might think of a specific rural dialect as uneducated, rustic or wrong, it is thus conceived of as “lower” than the “high” metropolitan dialect, which sounds educated, cosmopolitan and correct. The vertical dimension is thus a members’ resource of attributing value to horizontal linguistic differentiation. This attribution of value also structures the style switching and register modulation of speakers, which they employ as communicative indexes to position themselves towards social personas and cultural identities. In the current globalised era, more than perhaps ever before, Blommaert (2010, 4–6) argues, we have to understand such communicative resources as being “in motion” rather than “in place”, and therefore one of the major challenges is to understand sociolinguistics not as variation across a stable horizontal space and chronological time (i.e. the synchronic snapshot), but as a layered interaction of various spatio-temporal scales.

The notion of scales brings together the horizontal and the vertical dimensions as contexts, i.e. as frames of normativity and appropriateness. Such frames are theoretically nothing new in sociolinguistic theory. Blommaert points to Gumperz’s contextualisation cues, Goffman’s frames, Bakhtin’s intertextuality and Bourdieu’s habitus and sums up:

In all cases, the concepts identify *the jump from one scale to another*: from the individual to the collective, the temporally situated to the trans-temporal, the unique to the common, the token to the type, the specific to the general. And *the connection between such scales is indexical*: it resides in the ways in which unique instances of communication can be captured indexically as ‘framed’, understandable communication, as pointing towards socially and culturally ordered norms, genres, traditions, expectations – phenomena of a higher scale level. (Blommaert 2010, 33, emphasis in original)

Blommaert claims that in theorising such micro-macro dimensions, so far scholars have elaborately described the movements and connections between scales, yielding concepts like intertextuality, entextualisation, contextualisation, and recontextualisation (see also Kell 2009), but have failed to understand exactly what is being moved and connected: context. He uses the concept of scale “as an attempt to at least provide a metaphor that suggests that we have to imagine things that are of a *different order*, that are hierarchically linked and stratified” (Blommaert 2010, 33, emphasis in original). Blommaert’s use of “things” (Latin: *res*) is programmatic here, I suggest. The thingification (or reification) of contextualisation into context parallels the essentialism we encountered in aggregationist theorising. This might lead us to believe that Blommaert’s theory is unfit for our purposes of researching and theorising small cultures with the notion of downscaling. It speaks about things, orders, hierarchical links and stratification; the vocabulary of onion-skin approaches. However, scales, in Blommaert’s system, is not an analytical category but a members’ resource; an emic system of hierarchically ordered values that emerge in an interaction and with which power and identities are negotiated by speakers. Scales as a members’ communicative resource has to be linked to two further concepts to make them analytically relevant: orders of indexicality and polycentricity—and it is in this analytical operationalisation in which we can recognise the processual and dialectic nature of “things” (see also Wood, this volume).

Building on Silverstein’s (2003) influential notion of ‘indexical order’, Blommaert’s (2005; 2010) theorises every linguistic instance as value-laden and hierarchically layered. Silverstein sees the pragmatic meaning of semiotic instances as emerging from orders of similarity and stability, indexing presupposition and entailment. In other words, the unique, individual semiotic instances can enter into the construction of a register, through enregisterment (Agha 2003), and this is where they aggregate to voices of social recognisability (Agha 2005). By invoking such recognisable voices, speakers draw on contexts of cultural normativity and appropriateness and they then speak *as* a specific social persona, they speak e.g. *as* a gay man, *as* a wine connoisseur, *as* a golfer, *as* an immigrant, *as* a nurse, *as* a Polish wife or *as* a Greek woman; structuring narratives and interactional roles and turns. Blommaert (2010, 38) understands this Silversteinian indexical order as “a positive force, it produces social categories, recognizable semiotic emblems for groups and individuals, a more or less coherent semiotic habitat”. Blommaert adds to this a higher-level ‘order of indexicality’ (inspired by Foucault’s orders of discourse) and argues that this level is necessary for a sociolinguistics of mobility to acknowledge that indexical orders

operate within large stratified complexes in which some forms of semiosis are systematically perceived as valuable, others are less valuable and some are not taken into account at all, while all are subject to rules of access and regulations as to circulation. (Blommaert 2010, 38)

In the study of intercultural communication, such orders of indexicality pushes research to critically interpret the higher-level structurations of how cultural normativity and appropriateness are negotiated amongst speakers and thereby pay closer attention to questions of power and inequality at play in intercultural encounters.

‘Polycentricity’ is the term Blommaert (2010, 39) uses to designate the fact that speakers also attend to various centres of “evaluative authority”. In almost every instance of communication, he argues, more than one centre is present and language in use is thus fundamentally polyphonic (Blommaert 2010, 40). However, this does not mean that all centres have equal value (see also Kheirkhah, this volume; Lloyd, this volume). For instance, Blommaert’s research on interviews with asylum-seeking applicants in Belgium shows that the asylum-seekers’ accounts were

deemed untruthful by Belgian officials. The asylum-seekers' accounts often mimicked the "chaotic and paradoxical realities" (Blommaert 2010, 40) of war-driven regions in Africa and their dangerous journey to Europe. This "iconically resulted in a chaotic and paradoxical story" (Blommaert 2010, 40). The Belgian officials' centre of authority, in contrast, was regimented by "a particular textual (bureaucratic) ideal of decontextualizable coherence, linearity and factuality" (Blommaert 2010, 40). In this instance of intercultural communication, the asylum-seekers' order of indexicality was non-focal, in that it had less value than the order of indexicality of Belgian bureaucracy. Thus the centres of evaluative authority are not only a matter of vertical differentiation of the micro and macro, but also include horizontal variation in space-time (see also Kell 2009). While speakers move up and down the orders of indexicality, they also orient towards multiple centres of normativity and appropriateness that are informed by different cultural regimes (see also Westinen, this volume).

Blommaert (2010, 35) provides a simple example of upscaling to illustrate his points, he quotes a constructed dialogue between a PhD student and his tutor:

Student: I'll start my dissertation with a chapter reporting on my fieldwork.

Tutor: We start our dissertations with a literature review chapter here.

The tutor's scale jump is a strong-arm tactic in this interaction and it makes visible that scales are a communicative resource to solidify arguments and execute power. Through the use of "we", "our", the timeless present, plural in "dissertations" and the tutor's reference to "here", meaning an entity bigger than the immediate duo of interlocutors, namely the university department they are both part of, the tutor vertically upscales the student's individual, unique, momentary plans. Blommaert argues that the tutor creates normative validity by using concepts that operate on a higher scale than the student's. The upscaling involves a range of semiotic transformations (see Table 2-1).

Table 2-1: Semiotic transformations in scale jumping (Blommaert 2010, 35)

| Lower scale | Higher scale |
|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Momentary | Timeless |
| Local, situated | Translocal, widespread |
| Personal, individual | Impersonal, collective |
| Contextualized | Decontextualized |
| Subjective | Objective |
| Specific | General, categorical |
| Token | Type |
| Individual | Role |
| Diversity, variation | Uniformity, homogeneity |

It is clear, moreover, Blommaert (2010, 36) asserts, that the tutor, and only the tutor, has the liberty to jump scales here, as her institutionalised role makes her assume the more powerful position in the horizontal social differentiation. This vertical upscaling allows the tutor to access communicative resources that are valued higher in the specific small-culture regime of the university she learned to operate in. Of course, this scale jump is also an instance of horizontal outscaling, as the tutor evokes a scale that is beyond epistemic reach for the student, as evident in her switching into a professional jargon (Blommaert 2010, 36) or, we could imagine, had she cited objective economic figures or other authorities like French philosophers in order to solidify her argument. The possibility of rescaling for argumentation in intercultural communication is thus not only dependant on cultural belonging, but also on questions of power/knowledge in the Foucauldian sense (for revealing critical analyses of power, history and interaction in intercultural communication, see Shi-xu 2006; Kramsch and Boner 2010). For our purposes in this volume we could analyse the tutor-student interaction as an instance of intercultural communication, at least from a small-culture perspective. Although the student and the tutor might belong to the same big-C Culture, they also belong to the same small culture, namely the specific discipline, department and university culture they (might aspire to) work in. In this small culture, they, however, occupy different institutional roles and positions of experience and expertise. The tutor's scale jumping reveals that the multi-scalar context of this interaction is unevenly ordered, and that the tutor has the communicative resources available to invoke a higher-level order of indexicality, which is more powerful in this small culture.

Attending to the multiscalearity of such small-culture formations allows researchers a complex view on how speakers themselves orient to higher-level norms of normativity and appropriateness, how they upscale to wield argumentative power, or how their voices are downscaled and silenced (see also Porsché, this volume). Such analysis goes beyond searching for tokens where speakers explicitly mention their cultural orientation, but begins to attend to processes of rescaling that are achieved through subtle linguistic and discursive alternations in the semiotic transformations of speakers (see also Victoria, this volume). These transformations, or what Kell (2009) analyses as recontextualisations, create a different order of indexicality, where a different normativity and

appropriateness prevails, and where power can be gained or lost—this order of indexicality could in fact be a national culture, but it does not have to be one. The national, ethnic or linguistic culture of the speaker is at the very least ‘not necessarily always’ the target context of such rescaling processes, as the studies collected in this volume demonstrate. In order for intercultural communication research to recognise such transformations as a members’ resource, I suggest to downscale culture analytically.

6. Downscaling Culture

While speakers usually upscale and invoke a higher order of indexicality to argue for their cause, the small-culture and anti-essentialist perspective demands researchers to impose a weaker imposition on reality (Holliday 1999, 240), and therefore, I propose that intercultural communication research begins by downscaling culture analytically. Furthermore I suggest, with Kell (2013), that analysis has to be dynamic and move between scales to better understand linguistic and cultural phenomena. In the current phase of globalisation, moreover, polycentric contexts become pronounced more notably and intercultural communication research is pushed to understand communicative resources as mobile (Blommaert 2010). Such an epistemology, one that has been developed in human geography (e.g. Swyngedouw 1999; Uitermark 2002), history (Wallerstein 1997) and sociology (Sassen 2007), provides a number of ideas to envision a downscaled perspective on intercultural communication.

For instance, the essay “Power-geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place” by the human geographer Massey (1993) invites us to imagine taking a ride on a satellite and lift off to outer space. From there we can observe social and cultural life on earth as operating on multiple scales.

Imagine for a moment that you are on a satellite, further out and beyond all actual satellites; you can see ‘planet earth’ from a distance and, rare for someone with only peaceful intentions, you are equipped with the kind of technology that allows you to see the colours of people’s eyes and the number on their number-plates. You can see all the movement and tune-in to all the communication that is going on. Furthest out are the satellites, then aeroplanes, the long haul between London and Tokyo and the hop from San Salvador to Guatemala City. Some of this is people moving, some of it is physical trade, some is media broadcasting. There are faxes, e-mail, film-distribution networks, financial flows and transactions. Look in closer there are ships and trains, steam trains slogging laboriously up hill somewhere in Asia. Look closer still and there are lorries and cars and buses and on down further and somewhere in sub-Saharan Africa there’s a woman on foot who still spends hours a day collecting water. (Massey 1993, 61)

Massey wishes to highlight here the power-geometry of the globalisation era, namely that the different actors she mentions are all differently, and unequally, positioned in globalisation’s flows and in its interconnections. Some actors are more in charge of these flows than others, some initiate and control the flows while others are at the receiving end, and some are “still” excluded from taking part in the flows (Massey 1993, 61). What I would like to take out from Massey’s imaginary satellite journey is that researchers can zoom in and out and focus on different vertical scales of culture. The various focal points along the vertical scale axis can inform each other in a way that a flat horizontal analysis cannot (see also Kell 2009). This also means that analysing cultural phenomena—both vertically and horizontally—requires a range of analytical tools. For instance focusing in on the aeroplanes and ships and trains requires a quite different set of analytical tools than focusing in on the sub-Saharan woman collecting water on foot. The different focal points require different modes of analysis, such as studying transportation economies, conducting surveys, interviewing or ethnographic fieldwork. Moreover, Massey’s example also shows that vertical scales of the micro-macro dichotomy and horizontal scales of sociocultural space-time are intertwined. The financial and communicative flows she mentions for instance will all crystallise in first-tier global cities like London, New York, Tokyo, Frankfurt, Hong Kong (and within these cities in specific districts), the containerships will eventually all queue up in the harbours of Shanghai, Singapore or Rotterdam, the film-distribution networks will spiral from Mumbai, Lagos, Los Angeles, the urban poor collect water on foot, or tap the pipelines, in the informal settlements of Mexico City, Karachi, Nairobi or Johannesburg. Whatever vertical scale we make the focus of our interest, it will take us to different places and networks of places. This works the other way around as well: whatever place or network we are interested in will require various foci on the vertical dimension.

Downscaling can be a first way of getting at the empirical bottom of abstract constructs like culture, nation or ideology. Focussing in on micro-interactive processes of intercultural communication promises to even out the predominance of regarding culture as an aggregated macro fact. This does not mean that there is one, and only one, best scale for analysis. On the contrary, I suggest that downscaling is an analytical process and it is thus the ‘movement between scales’ that becomes informative for analysis. The journey is its own reward. Once the analysis has arrived at the lowest scale, or at a quite low scale, we have to ask if the journey we took from above, from our abstract macro-construct, was informative or not. We might want to analytically move up again, aggregate, and then start to downscale and rescale yet again and explore other routes, other possibilities of using macro contexts to analyse micro texts (see also Kantara, this volume; Cserző, this volume).

In the same way as the tutor or the Belgian officials upscale to a higher-level order of normativity and appropriateness, intercultural communication researchers often aggregate individual-level tokens into macro-level types, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter. I suggest that we need to downscale the analysis of intercultural encounters and attend to the scaled normativities that emerge as operational in a given interaction. This promises a recognition of the relation between scales. However, it is not enough to merely zoom in or focus on the micro and entirely disregard the macro, although this could be—and should be, I propose—an initial step in the research process. Rather it is precisely the dialectical and processual relationship between the macro and micro that becomes informative for understanding interactions. Kell (2013, 20) likewise proposes to start analysis “from the bottom up” to understand “the ways in which people are able or are not able to project their meanings vertically”. Following the rescaling processes of participants, macro-cultures like nations could in fact come up as relevant factors for analysis, yet these could also not become contextualised as a scale at all. I propose as a first epistemological step, therefore, to look the other way and analytically downscale, downplay, the importance of big-C Cultures in intercultural communication research (see also Wilczek-Watson, this volume, for an account of downplaying as a members’ category).

The phenomenological and linguistically-turned social sciences have of course already offered methodologies for downscaling macro analytical categories. Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) constructivist critique of knowledge, society and reality, Garfinkel’s (1967) ethnomethodology and Goffman’s (1967) attention to “small behaviors” in face-to-face interaction are perhaps the best-known sociological accounts of such downscaling. Following on from this, conversation analysis has put forward “unmotivated looking” (Psathas 1995, 45) in its attempts to situate analysis exclusively in a micro-interactional context. More radically even, the geographers Marston, Jones and Woodward (2005, 420) propose to “abandon hierarchical [i.e. vertical] scale in its entirety”. An analytical downscaling of culture can thus build on research that attends to micro interactional phenomena and avoids to take for granted macro socio-demographic categories of belonging. In intercultural communication research, however, such categories of belonging are still widely used as fixed macro-contexts to analyse miscommunication between people with different national backgrounds. The notion of downscaling culture pushes the field of intercultural communication to become more flexible in defining what constitutes a culture is and how participants themselves make culture relevant in their interaction, however small or large this culture might be.

7. Culture as Weather

Finally, I will briefly allude to the concept of downscaling in physical geography, for metaphorical uptake in intercultural communication research. In meteorology the climate is studied by using general circulation models (GCMs). These are mathematical models that simulate atmospheric and oceanic movements. GCMs operate on a macro scale, and simulate the climate of the entire globe, using a relatively coarse grid resolution. These global models are restricted in their usefulness for so-called “subgrid scale applications” (Wilby and Wigley 1997, 530) as their coarse resolution does not allow to correctly parameterise local weather conditions and local climate change. This is so because the local weathers are not only influenced by the global climate but also by local conditions like soils, vegetation, topography and clouds. The GCMs cannot capture these fine-grained conditions and are thus not able to accurately predict local weathers. There are broadly two ways overcome to this problem (Wilby and Wigley 1997, 532–43). One is called dynamical downscaling, which uses the output of the GCM and applies more delicate grids to capture local phenomena and computes regional climate models. The other is called statistical downscaling, which correlates variables obtained from the GCM output with variables obtained from local observations and measurements.

Without going into more detail of meteorological questions here, I suggest that physical geography conceptualises analytical downscaling in a way that can inform our understanding of culture and communication in intercultural communication research. Metaphorically we could regard culture as weather and begin to acknowledge that large-scale models of culture are not delicate enough for studying small-scale culture in practice. I argue that there is a need to downscale our analysis of culture, either dynamically or statistically, to understand how communication attends to scales in small-culture formation. In intercultural communication it is perhaps quite likely that large-scale cultures become dominant contexts, but this is not a necessary proposition, as also all the chapters of this volume demonstrate. The best explanation for an instance of (mis)communication could be situated not on the scale of the national culture or the language community speakers belong to, but could be situated on a wholly different vertical or horizontal scale; a scale that would possibly even have been concealed in a traditional onion-skin analysis. Just as meteorologists must investigate small-scale phenomena of local weather if they want to understand global warming, or if they want to understand why it rains too much or too less at a given place and time of the year, or why a hurricane takes an unpredicted route, researching intercultural communication must attend to small cultures to be able to understand intercultural encounters in the contemporary globalised world.

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